16th Year of Publication

Weird Tales

APRIL

25c

THE GARDEN OF ADOMPHA

a strange tale of the fantastic sorceries of a dwarfish wizard

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Seabury Quinn
Carl Jacobi
Robert Bloch
Jack Williamson

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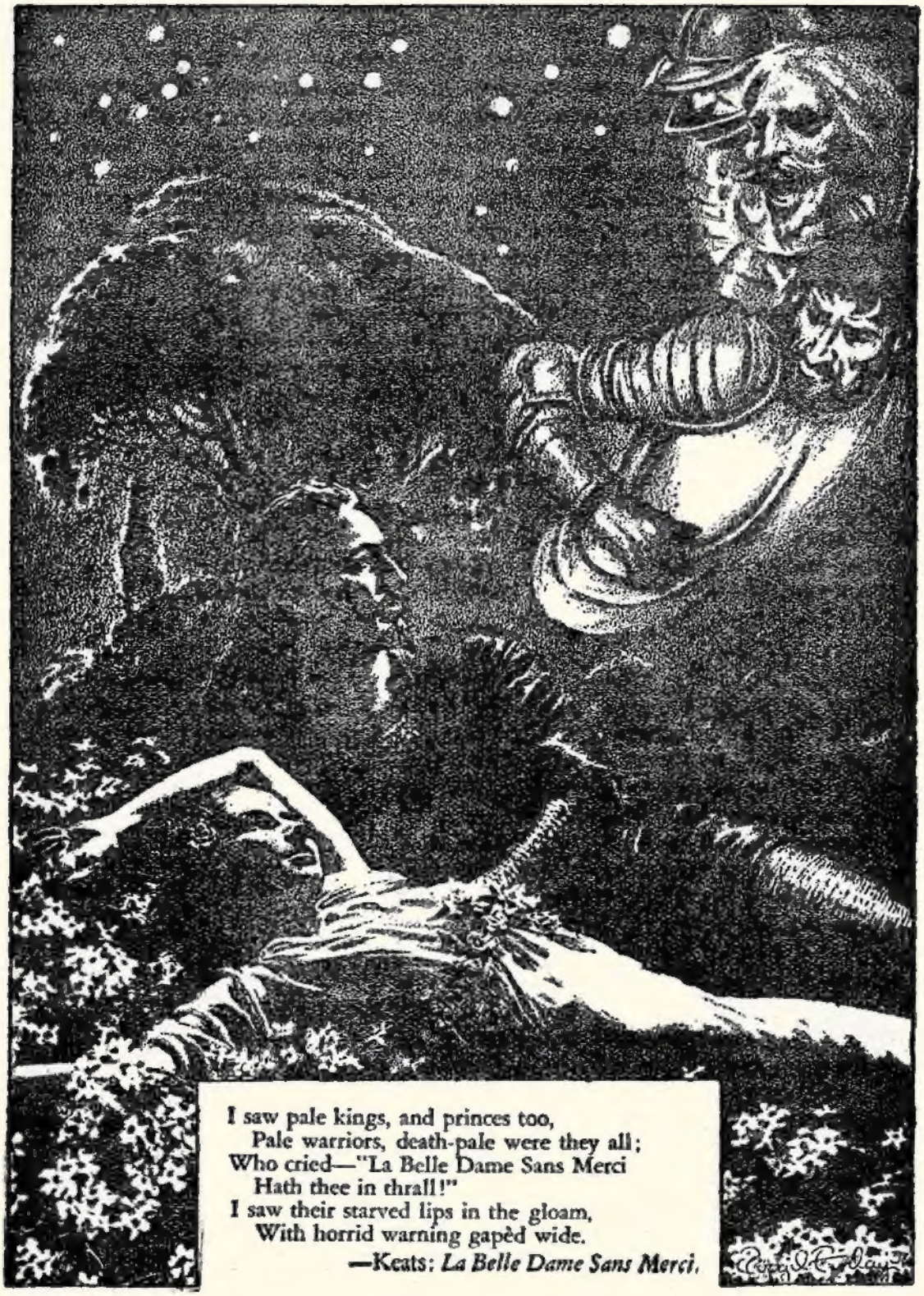

I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cried—"La Belle Dame Sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!"
I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gapèd wide.

—Keats: *La Belle Dame Sans Merci.*

A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

REGISTERED IN U.S. PATENT OFFICE

Volume 31 CONTENTS FOR APRIL, 1938 Number 4

Cover Design . . . . . **Virgil Finlay**
Illustrating a scene in "The Garden of Adompha"

La Belle Dame Sans Merci . . . . . **Virgil Finlay** **385**
Pictorial interpretation of a poem by Keats

The Devil Deals . . . . . **Carl Jacobi** **387**
A curious story about a fatal game of cards, played with a most peculiar deck

To Clark Ashton Smith . . . . . **H. P. Lovecraft** **392**
A tribute in verse, from a dead poet to a living one

The Garden of Adompha . . . . . **Clark Ashton Smith** **393**
A weird tree grew in the garden of King Adompha and bore strange fruit

The Temple Dancer . . . . . **Seabury Quinn** **400**
An intriguing story, about the gracious lady who protected her own

The Singer in the Mist . . . . . **Robert E. Howard** **423**
Verse

The Eyes of the Mummy . . . . . **Robert Bloch** **424**
A fascinating Egyptian story with a strange and terrible climax

Forest of Evil . . . . . **John Murray Reynolds** **434**
Weird adventures and dire perils in the Dead Forest of Sanaala

Cordelia's Song . . . . . **Vincent Starrett** **454**
Verse

Dreadful Sleep (part 2) . . . . . **Jack Williamson** **455**
A romantic and tragic novel, about fearsome beings that lay in slumber under the antarctic ice

The House of Ecstasy . . . . . **Ralph Milne Farley** **479**
This happened to you—don't you remember that strange adventure in the house of the hypnotist?

Abandoned Bog . . . . . **Joseph C. Kempe** **484**
Verse

Death Is a Temporary Indisposition . . . . . **Max Brod** **485**
A story by a German writer, adapted by Roy Temple House

Weird Story Reprint:
Feathertop . . . . . **Nathaniel Hawthorne** **490**
A classic weird tale by an American author

The Eyrie **506**
The readers discuss the magazine

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 East Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, Cuba, Mexico, South America, Spain, $2.50; Canada, $2.75; elsewhere, $3.00. English office: Otis A. Kline, c/o John Paradise, 86 Strand, W. C. 2, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 840 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"It was the strangest and perhaps the oldest deck in existence."

The Devil Deals

By CARL JACOBI

An odd and curious story about a fatal game of cards, played with a most peculiar deck containing neither spades, hearts, diamonds, nor clubs

THE MAN accosted Sargent at the intersection of Charing Cross and Oxford. He was tall, with a long black rain-cape, an oddly-shaped alpine hat, and a cane. He said:

"I beg pardon, sir. But do you play cards?"

Sargent turned up his collar against the drizzle and shivered. For an hour he had known he was being followed. From Russell Square to the British Museum to Dyott Street, while fog swept steadily in from the Embankment, he had gradually increased his pace, aware of the muffled steps behind.

"Cards?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

The man extended a claw-like hand. "I am Doctor Paul Losada. You have perhaps heard of me . . ."

A little shock darted up Sargent's spine.

". . . And you are Basil Sargent, the man who won thirty thousand pounds at

Monte Carlo, who broke the bank at Wang Tau's in Singapore, playing *main-po* three years ago. In short, you are, unless I am mistaken, the most well-informed person on games of chance in London at the present time."

"I am Basil Sargent, yes," Sargent replied coldly.

"Then, *Señor*"—the stranger's pallid face seemed to swirl uncertainly in the fog—"may I ask a favor of you? I live but a short distance from here. Would you do me the honor of coming to my apartment? My wife and I are looking for a fourth at whist. But more than that, I have something I would like to show you, something which I believe you will appreciate more than anyone else."

"And what," Sargent asked uneasily, "do you wish to show me?"

A gleam leaped into the man's black eyes. "A deck of cards, *Señor,* bearing neither hearts, clubs, spades, nor diamonds—the strangest and perhaps the oldest deck in existence."

Sargent was expecting another answer, and his relief in not getting it left him cold for a moment. For a long time he stood there in silence. Then he smiled. Losada, eh? Inez Losada's impossible husband. The man must take him for a fool.

But why not? The situation which, to a less handsome, less confident man, might have loomed dangerous seemed only amusing to the gambler.

"I'll go," he said.

Rumbling down Charing Cross, their cab turned right at Old Compton Street and headed into Soho. Doctor Losada's residence was on Rupert Street, a huge stone pile that seemed to shrink back despondently in the shadows.

THE doctor led the way down a gas-lit corridor to a door on the second floor back. Inside, he disappeared for a moment, then returned, followed by a man and a woman.

"My wife, Inez," he said. "Her brother, Ricardo."

Sargent bowed. "I have met the *Señora* once before," he smirked. "Wasn't it at Covent Garden?"

She was black-haired and strikingly beautiful, and there was a ghost of a smile about her reddened lips as she replied:

"Perhaps. I go to the opera frequently."

Doctor Losada opened a card table, placed four chairs around it.

"We will begin with whist," he said. "But first let me show you the cards."

He opened a small ivory box, took out a deck and spread it on the table top.

Sargent stared.

For twenty years as a professional card sharp he had earned his living by his wits. For twenty years he had wandered from city to city, winning games of chance by his own trickery and cunning, taking fortunes from the gullible. But never had he seen a deck like the one before him.

As Losada had said, the suits were distinguished by neither hearts, diamonds, clubs, nor spades. The two black suits were snakes and harpies, with a knave, a queen, a king, and ten pip-cards, including an ace. The two red suits were the same, except that their markings were spiders and moonflowers. In spite of the cards' apparent age, they were in remarkably preserved condition.

But most unusual of all was the joker. The very presence of this card seemed to constrict Sargent's lungs with a feeling of suffocation. Blackly marked on a white surface, it showed a small skull, a death's-head.

"Where did you get them?" Sargent asked, looking up.

Doctor Losada smiled. "The pack was

sent me by a friend in Seville. As it happened, they were almost lost before they arrived."

"Lost?"

"They were sent by plane," Losada explained. "The pilot was stricken ill, en route to Croydon, and the ship crashed. Only part of the mail was recovered."

Losada now took the deck and shuffled it. "High card deals," he said, motioning Sargent to draw.

Sargent drew the knave and laid it down before him. And then a curious coincidence occurred. Losada's wife, Inez, drew the queen. Losada took the king. Knave, queen, king in direct rotation. Ricardo's card was a low number.

Losada cut and began to deal. A moment later play started. The game was a close one, and for a while, although there were no stakes, Sargent's old interest held him to each move. Gradually, however, other thoughts began to invade his brain, and he took and lost tricks mechanically.

Did Doctor Losada know him by name only? Had he chosen him for a fourth simply because he desired a person of his reputation to examine his antique deck?

Or was he aware of the clandestine affair between Sargent and the *Señora*, Inez? Did the doctor know that during the many nights his practise took him from his apartment, Sargent had visited his wife in secret?

There was no doubt that Inez was a beautiful woman. Her eyes were large. Her skin was like tinted satin, and her figure, as she sat there, was little concealed by her low-cut gown.

In the center of the table, next to the trump card, the joker still lay, face up. Looking at it, Sargent again got the impression that something about the card was affecting his breathing. It seemed as if an invisible dust fog were passing from that tiny death's-head into his nostrils.

The game centered down to the last trick. Again that coincidence occurred. Sargent's card was the knave. Inez played the queen, and Losada without the slightest show of emotion took the trick with his king. Once more rotation had been knave, queen, king—with king the winner.

At one a. m. Sargent took his leave. He expressed his thanks and pleasure for the evening. But as he descended to the street, some inner urge prompted him to look back over his shoulder.

Rupert Street lay dark and deserted, with only an occasional street lamp to light the oldish buildings on either side. But directly above the apartment he had just left, a solid, compact cloud-mass hung low in the night sky. He shuddered. For as he looked, it seemed to Sargent that that cloud bore the same design as the joker card of Losada's deck, and that something, dry and smothering like smoke, was creeping down from the death's-head in the heavens into his lungs.

THE telephone in his Bloomsbury hotel woke Sargent early next morning.

"This is Doctor Losada," came the voice on the wire. "I'm sorry to trouble you again, but after you left last night I was unable to locate one of the cards of my deck. I desire very much to keep that deck intact, and I am wondering if you would mind looking to see if it attached itself unnoticed to your clothes."

"Just a minute," Sargent said.

He opened his wardrobe closet, searched quickly through the clothes he had worn the previous evening. In the rain-jacket, in the torn lower hem—sure enough, there was the card, the knave of snakes.

"The card is here," he said into the

phone. "I'll mail it to you at once, doctor."

"Why not bring it yourself, *Señor?* Say tonight at nine, and we can have another game."

THAT night Sargent again stood before the gloomy corridor door of Doctor Losada's apartment on Rupert Street. All day the events of the night before had lingered in his brain, troubling him. Try though he would to fight it off, a distinct sense of terror seemed closing in on him. He felt as if he were gradually being drawn into a web from which he could not keep away, and from which there was no escape.

No response came to his pull at the bell. He tried the latch, opened the door and entered. The apartment was lighted but empty. Then he saw the note on the table.

Señor Sargent:

A thousand pardons, but neither my wife, Ricardo, nor I will be able to be with you at the agreed hour. An urgent matter has come up, requiring our presence elsewhere.

You may amuse yourself, if you wish, until we return, with the cards. They are in the lower right compartment of the wall cabinet.

LOSADA.

Sargent scowled and nervously lighted a cigarette. He turned toward the door. But the desire to view that deck once more became overpowering.

A moment later, hat and coat removed, he opened the little ivory box and took out the cards. In the droning solitude of the room he shuffled and re-shuffled—then mechanically began to play solitaire.

There are many ways to play solitaire. Sargent's game was quite simple. A cross was made of five cards. On the cross, cards were played in *down* rotation without regard to suit. The corner cards finished out the square and were played upon in *up* rotation, according to suit. The object was to build these corners into complete sets of thirteen each.

Rapidly he played. He was on the verge of winning when he saw that his last card, the queen, could not be played. The king had gone into the discard pile, and he was unable to retrieve it.

He shuffled and tried again. But at the end of half an hour he stood again blocked. In three games, each with the queen in the corner, a king prevented him from winning.

Sargent felt a bead of cold sweat stand out on his brow. Terror, an invisible, nameless thing, seemed to rise from the pasteboards in his hands and close about him like a winding sheet.

Impulsively and for no definite reason he could think of at the moment he swept the cards together, jammed them into the ivory box and placed the box in his pocket. Puzzled at his action, yet lacking the will-power to change it, he took up his hat and coat and went out.

An hour later he was back in his Bloomsbury rooms, nervously downing a glass of brandy. The liquor quieted him somewhat, and he slumped into a chair, picked up a book and tried to read.

But the print swam before his eyes. Questions unanswerable hammered at him. Knave, queen, king. In all his experience at card playing, never had Sargent seen those three cards turn up in such chronological succession. It was weird!

He stirred restlessly. A curious chill, seeming to emanate from the ceiling above, filled the room.

Could it be possible that there was any significance in those cards? Did, for example, the queen represent Inez, the king Doctor Losada, and the knave himself? But no, such a thought was absurd.

At length Sargent tossed his book aside, undressed and went to bed.

It seemed he had but fallen asleep when he awoke, sat bolt upright, trembling in every nerve and muscle. The room was black as pitch, and there was no sound save the far-away rumble of a distant tram-car. He listened.

Faintly there came to his ears a low rustling, a scraping as of objects brushing against each other in frantic haste. It grew louder, died away.

Sargent leaped out of bed, snapped on the wall switch, flooding the room with light.

There was no one before him. The room was empty. And then, with a start, he found himself staring down at the table.

Ripped from its hinges as if by some internal force, the cover of the ivory box lay open. And Losada's deck of cards! They were arranged on the table in a partly completed game of solitaire. More than that, a chair was drawn up, though Sargent was positive none had been there before.

It was as if everything had been prepared for him to play.

Slowly he moved forward. The corner cards were queens. Three corners had been built to the trey, but the last was still vacant.

Once again that overpowering urge swept over him. A definite psychic power drew him into the chair, moved his hands irresistibly toward the cards.

He began to move through the deck, playing slowly. The game wore on, and a vague horror began to rise within him.

The king! It was his unseen opponent. Like a hunted thing, jeering at his efforts, it remained unattainable in the discard pile.

Suddenly the telephone rang. Sargent lifted the instrument.

"Yes?"

A voice filled with triumph and mockery came over the wire. "This is Doctor Losada. Listen carefully, for what I have to say will be of interest to you.

"Please do not think our recent meeting was a matter of chance. I have known you, watched you for the past four months. I sought you out, not because of your reputation as a gambler—but because of my wife.

"My wife, yes. Did you think your intrigue with her could escape me unnoticed? Ah no, *Señor*. Doctor Losada is not that much of a fool. You have robbed me of the thing I prize most, and I have planned my revenge.

"Are you listening? You are now seated at a table, playing cards. My cards. It is not an ordinary deck, as you have perhaps guessed. It was fashioned by a Spanish sorcerer in the Fourteenth Century.

"Play your game of solitaire, *Señor*. Play with all the skill you possess. The card which represents you in the deck is the knave of snakes. The queen is Inez, my wife. *The king is myself*.

"Watch the king. Your only salvation is to defeat it with your knave. *Adios, Señor*."

The phone clicked, and Sargent sat there, staring. Slowly he forked the instrument, picked up the cards. The words that had come over the wire were etched like fire in his brain.

But suddenly he laughed. Knave was he? Very well, as knave he would steal the queen and laugh in the king's face. With trembling fingers he began to move through the deck. Upon the trey he played in quick succession the four, the five, the six. The discard pile was lessening.

On and on he played. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead as he mar-

shaled his forces. He was closing in on the king, and he was utilizing all of his skill to accomplish it.

A hiss of satisfaction came to his lips. Remained but one card to be played, and he would win.

And then a wave of horror billowed over him. The king card was moving, rising of its own accord from the discard pile. And as it moved, the card beneath slid out and fell upon the table directly beneath Sargent's gaze.

The joker!

He had forgotten it. Now as he sat staring at that leering death's-head that same horrible sense of suffocation seized him. His throat closed tight; his eyes bulged. It was as though an invisible poisonous miasma was floating from that painted skull, crawling into his lungs like a bulbous thing alive. He was choking. Choking . . .

He screamed and lurched to his feet. Gasping, he tore at his throat.

The joker card seemed to leave the table, to float before his eyes. He clawed at the rug, sucked wildly for air.

But gradually and relentlessly blackness closed in on him, and he felt his life ebb away.

THE *London Morning Post* carried the following item the next day:

An unfortunate tragedy occurred last night in a room of a Bloomsbury hotel. Mr. Basil Sargent, who won lasting fame by his unusual winnings at Baccarat at Monte Carlo, was found dead, apparently of asphyxiation.

Investigations showed that the room's gas fixture had been left turned on.

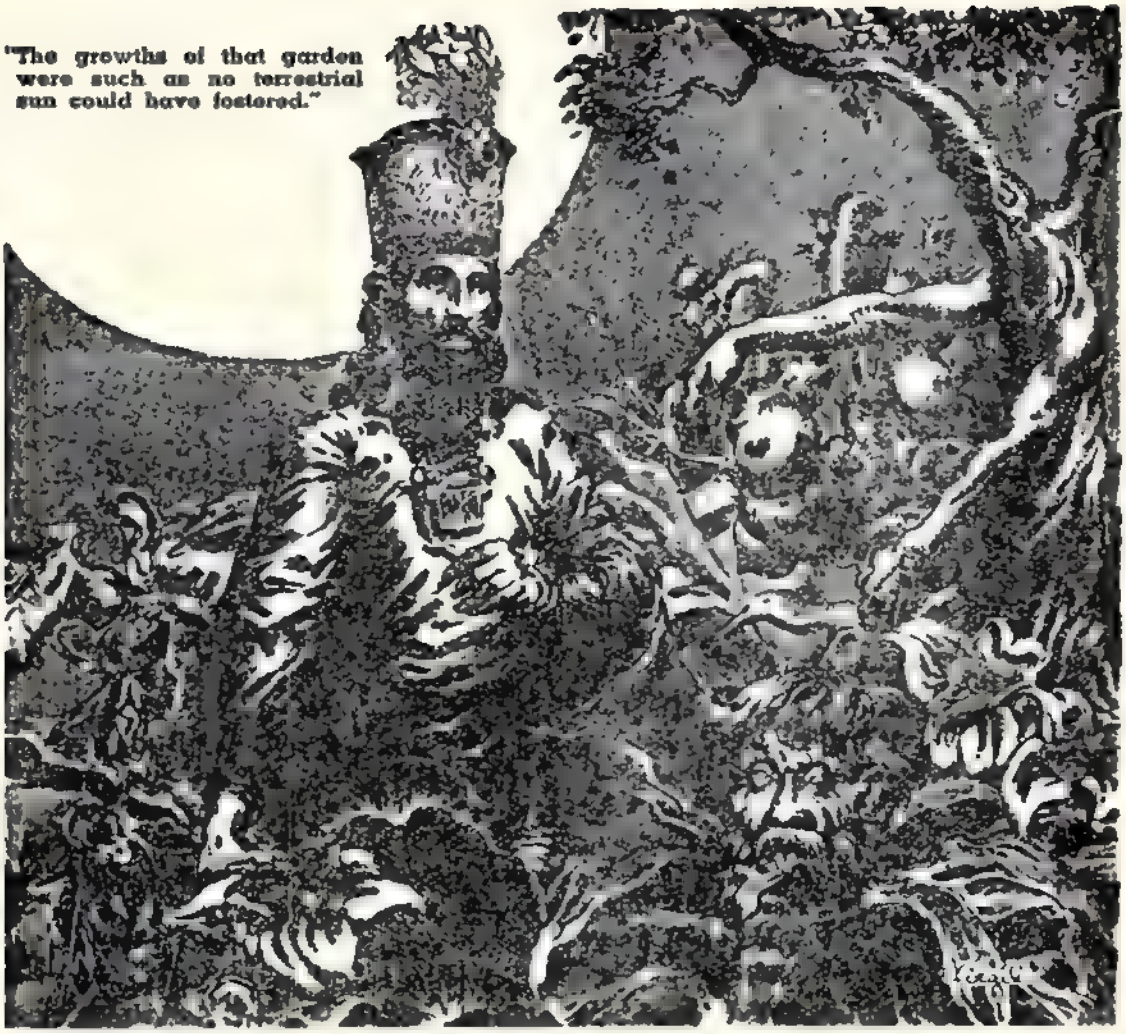
Police place no credence in the rumor that a man dressed in black rain-cape stole into the hotel and entered the dead man's room some time after he retired.

To Clark Ashton Smith

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A time-black tower against dim banks of cloud;
  Around its base the pathless, pressing wood.
Shadow and silence, moss and mold, enshroud
  Gray, age-felled slabs that once as cromlechs stood.
No fall of foot, no song of bird awakes
  The lethal aisles of sempiternal night,
Though oft with stir of wings the dense air shakes,
  As in the tower there glows a pallid light.

For here, apart, dwells one whose hands have wrought
  Strange eidola that chill the world with fear;
Whose graven runes in tones of dread have taught
  What things beyond the star-gulfs lurk and leer.
Dark Lord of Averoigne—whose windows stare
On pits of dream no other gaze could bear!



"The growths of that garden were such as no terrestrial sun could have fostered."

The Garden of Adompha

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A strange and fantastic tale about a weird tree that grew in the garden of King Adompha and bore strange fruit through the sorceries of a dwarfish wizard

Lord of the sultry, red parterres
And orchards sunned by hell's unsetting flame!
Amid thy garden blooms the Tree which bears
Unnumbered heads of demons for its fruit,
And, like a slithering serpent, runs the root
That is called Baaras;

And there the forky, pale mandragoras,
Self-torn from out the soil, go to and fro,
Calling upon thy name
Till men new-damned will deem that devils pass,
Crying in wrathful frenzy and strange woe.

—*Ludar's Litany to Thasaidon.*

IT WAS well known that Adompha, king of the wide orient isle of Sotar, possessed amid his far-stretching palace grounds a garden secret from all men except himself and the court magician, Dwerulas. The square-built granite walls of the garden, high and formidable as those of a prison, were plain for all to see, rearing above the stately beefwood and camphor trees, and broad plots of multi-colored blossoms. But nothing had ever been ascertained regarding its interior: for such care as it required was given only by the wizard beneath Adompha's direction; and the twain spoke thereof in deep riddles that none could interpret. The thick brazen door responded to a mechanism whose mystery they shared with none other; and the king and Dwerulas, whether separately or together, visited the garden only at those hours when others were not abroad. And none could verily boast that he had beheld even so much as the opening of the door.

Men said that the garden had been roofed over against the sun with great sheets of lead and copper, leaving no cranny through which the tiniest star could peer down. Some swore that the privacy of its masters during their visits was ensured by a lethean slumber which Dwerulas, through his magic art, was wont to lay at such times upon the whole vicinity.

A mystery so salient could hardly fail to provoke curiosity, and sundry different beliefs arose concerning the garden's nature. Some averred that it was filled with evil plants of nocturnal habit, that yielded their swift and mordant poisons for Adompha's use, along with more insidious and baleful essences employed by the warlock in the working of his enchantments. Such tales, it seemed, were perhaps not without authority: since, following the construction of the closed garden, there had been at the royal court numerous deaths attributable to poisoning, and disasters that were plainly the sendings of a wizard, together with the bodily vanishment of people whose mundane presence no longer pleased Adompha or Dwerulas.

Other tales, of a more extravagant kind, were whispered among the credulous. That legend of unnatural infamy, which had surrounded the king from childhood, assumed a more hideous tinge; and Dwerulas, who had reputedly been sold to the Archdemon before birth by his haggish mother, acquired a new blackness of renown as one exceeding all other sorcerers in the depth and starkness of his abandonment.

Waking from such slumber and such dreams as the juice of the black poppy had given him, King Adompha rose in the dead, stagnant hours between moonset and dawn. About him the palace lay hushed like a charnel-house, its occupants having yielded to their nightly sopor of wine, drugs and arrack. Around the palace, the gardens and the capital city of Loithé slept beneath the slow stars of windless southern heavens. At this time Adompha and Dwerulas were wont to visit the high-walled close with little fear of being followed or observed.

Adompha went forth, pausing but briefly to turn the covert eye of his black bronze lantern into the lampless chamber adjoining his own. The room had been occupied by Thuloneah, his favorite odalisque for the seldom-equaled period of eight nights; but he saw without surprize or disconcertion that the bed of disorordered silks was now empty. By this, he felt sure that Dwerulas had preceded him to the garden. And he knew, moreover, that Dwerulas had not gone idly or unburdened.

The grounds of the palace, steeped everywhere in unbroken shadow, appeared to maintain that secrecy which the king preferred. He came to the shut bra-

zen door in the blankly towering granite wall; emitting, as he approached it, a sharp sibilation like the hissing of a cobra. In response to the rising and falling of this sound, the door swung inward silently, and closed silently behind him.

The garden, planted and tilled so privily, and sealed by its metal roof from the orbs of heaven, was illumined solely by a strange fiery globe that hung in mid-air at the center. Adompha regarded this globe with awe, for its nature and purveyance were mysterious to him. Dwerulas claimed that it had risen from hell on a moonless midnight at his bidding, and was levitated by infernal power, and fed with the never-dying flames of that clime in which the fruits of Thasaidon swelled to unearthly size and enchanted savor. It gave forth a sanguine light, in which the garden swam and weltered as if seen through a luminous mist of blood. Even in the bleak nights of winter, the globe yielded a genial warmth; and it fell never from its weird suspension, though without palpable support; and beneath it the garden flourished balefully, lush and exuberant as some parterre of the nether circles.

Indeed, the growths of that garden were such as no terrestrial sun could have fostered, and Dwerulas said that their seed was of like origin with the globe. There were pale, bifurcated trunks that strained upward as if to disroot themselves from the ground, unfolding immense leaves like the dark and ribbed wings of dragons. There were amaranthine blossoms, broad as salvers, supported by arm-thick stems that trembled continually.

And there were many other weird plants, diverse as the seven hells, and having no common characteristics other than the scions which Dwerulas had grafted upon them here and there through his unnatural and necromantic art.

These scions were the various parts and members of human beings. Consummately, and with never-failing success, the magician had joined them to the half-vegetable, half-animate stocks, on which they lived and grew thereafter, drawing an ichor-like sap. Thus were preserved the carefully chosen souvenirs of a multitude of persons who had inspired Dwerulas and the king with distaste or ennui. On palmy boles, beneath feathery-tufted foliage, the heads of eunuchs hung in bunches, like enormous black drupes. A bare, leafless creeper was flowered with the ears of delinquent guardsmen. Misshapen cacti were fruited with the breasts of women, or foliated with their hair. Entire limbs or torsos had been united with monstrous trees. Some of the huge salver-like blossoms bore palpitating hearts, and certain smaller blooms were centered with eyes that still opened and closed amid their lashes. And there were other graftings, too obscene or repellent for narration.

ADOMPHA went forward among the hybrid growths, which stirred and rustled at his approach. The heads appeared to crane toward him a little, the ears quivered, the breasts shuddered lightly, the eyes widened or narrowed as if watching his progress. These human remnants, he knew, lived only with the sluggish life of the plants, shared only in their sub-animal activity. He had regarded them with a curious and morbid esthetic pleasure, had found in them the infallible attraction of things enormous and hypernatural. Now, for the first time, he passed among them with a languid interest. He began to apprehend that fatal hour when the garden, with all its novel thaumaturgies, would offer no longer a refuge from his inexorable ennui.

At the core of the strange pleasance, where a circular space was still vacant

amid the crowding growths, Adompha came to a mound of loamy, fresh-dug earth. Beside it, wholly nude, and pale and supine as if in death, there lay the odalisque Thuloneah. Near her, various knives and other implements, together with vials of liquid balsams and viscid gums that Dwerulas used in his grafting, had been emptied upon the ground from a leathern bag. A plant known as the *dedaim*, with a bulbous, pulpy, whitish-green bole from whose center rose and radiated several leafless reptilian boughs, dripped upon Thuloneah's bosom an occasional drop of yellowish-red ichor from incisions made in its smooth bark.

Behind the loamy mound, Dwerulas rose to view with the suddenness of a demon emerging from his subterrene lair. In his hands he held the spade with which he had just finished digging a deep and grave-like hole. Beside the regal stature and girth of Adompha, he seemed no more than a wizened dwarf. His aspect bore all the marks of immense age, as if dusty centuries had sered his flesh and sucked the blood from his veins. His eyes glowed in the bottom of pit-like orbits; his features were black and sunken as those of a long-dead corpse; his body was gnarled as some millennial desert cedar. He stooped incessantly, so that his lank, knotty arms hung almost to the ground. Adompha marveled, as always, at the well-nigh demoniac strength of those arms; marveled that Dwerulas could have wielded the heavy shovel so expeditiously, could have carried to the garden on his back without human aid the burden of those victims whose members he had utilized in his experiments. The king had never demeaned himself to assist at such labors; but, after indicating from time to time the people whose disappearance would in no wise displease him, had done nothing more than watch and supervise the baroque gardening.

"Is she dead?" Adompha questioned, eyeing the luxurious limbs and body of Thuloneah without emotion.

"Nay," said Dwerulas, in a voice harsh as a rusty coffin-hinge, "but I have administered to her the drowsy and overpowering juice of the *dedaim*. Her heart beats impalpably, her blood flows with the sluggishness of that mingled ichor. She will not reawaken . . . save as a part of the garden's life, sharing its obscure sentience. I wait now your further instructions. What portion . . . or portions?"

"Her hands were very deft," said Adompha, as if musing aloud, in reply to the half-uttered question. "They knew the subtle ways of love and were learned in all amorous arts. I would have you preserve her hands . . . but nothing else."

The singular and magical operation had been completed. The fair, slim, tapering hands of Thuloneah, severed cleanly at the wrists, were attached with little mark of suture to the pale and lopped extremities of the two topmost branches of the *dedaim*. In this process the magician had employed the gums of infernal plants, and had repeatedly invoked the curious powers of certain underground genii, as was his wont on such occasions. Now, as if in suppliance, the semi-vegetable arms reached out toward Adompha with their human hands. The king felt a revival of his old interest in Dwerulas' horticulture, a queer excitement woke within him before the mingled grotesquery and beauty of the grafted plant. At the same time there lived again in his flesh the subtle ardors of outworn nights . . . for the hands were filled with memories.

He had quite forgotten Thuloneah's body, lying close by with its maimed arms. Recalled from his revery by the sudden movement of Dwerulas, he turned

and saw the wizard stooping above the unconscious girl, who had not stirred during the whole course of the operation. Blood still flowed and puddled upon the dark earth from the stumps of her wrists. Dwerulas, with that unnatural vigor which informed all his movements, seized the odalisque in his pipy arms and swung her easily aloft. His air was that of a laborer resuming his unfinished task; but he seemed to hesitate before casting her into the hole that would serve as a grave; where, through seasons warmed and illumined by the hell-drawn globe, her hidden, decaying body would feed the roots of that anomalous plant which bore her own hands for scions. It was as if he were loath to relinquish his voluptuous burden. Adompha, watching him curiously, was aware as never before of the stark evil and turpitude that flowed like an overwhelming fetor from Dwerulas' hunched body and twisted limbs.

DEEPLY as he himself had gone into all manner of iniquities, the king felt a vague revulsion. Dwerulas reminded him of a loathsome insect that he had once surprized during its ghoulish activities. He remembered how he had crushed the insect with a stone . . . and remembering, he conceived one of those bold and sudden inspirations that had always impelled him to equally sudden action. He had not, he told himself, entered the garden with any such thought: but the opportunity was too urgent and too perfect to be overpassed. The wizard's back was turned to him for the nonce; the arms of the wizard were encumbered with their heavy and pulchritudinous load. Snatching up the iron spade, Adompha brought it down on the small, withered head of Dwerulas with a fair amount of war-like strength inherited from heroic and piratic ancestors. The dwarf, still carrying Thuloneah, toppled forward into the deep pit.

Posing the spade for a second blow if such should be necessary, the king waited; but there was neither sound nor movement from the grave. He felt a certain surprize at having overcome with such ease the formidable magician, of whose superhuman powers he was half convinced; a certain surprize, too, at his own temerity. Then, reassured by his triumph, the king bethought him that he might try an experiment of his own: since he believed himself to have mastered much of Dwerulas' peculiar skill and lore through observation. The head of Dwerulas would form a unique and suitable addition to one of the garden plants. However, upon peering into the pit, he was forced to relinquish this idea: for he saw that he had struck only too well and had reduced the sorcerer's head to a state in which it was useless for his experiment, since such graftings required a certain integrity of the human part or member.

Reflecting, not without disgust, on the unlooked-for frailty of the skulls of magicians, which were easily squashed as emus' eggs, Adompha began to fill the pit with loam. The prone body of Dwerulas, the huddled form of Thuloneah beneath it, sharing the same inertness, were soon covered from view by the soft and dissolving clods. The king, who had grown to fear Dwerulas in his heart, was aware of a distinct relief when he had tamped the grave down very firmly and had leveled it smoothly with the surrounding soil. He told himself that he had done well: for the magician's stock of learning had come latterly to include too many royal secrets; and power such as his, whether drawn from nature or from occult realms, was never quite compatible with the secure dominion and prolonged empire of kings.

2

At king Adompha's court and throughout the sea-bordering city of Loithé, the vanishment of Dwerulas became the cause of much speculation but little inquiry. There was a division of opinion as to whether Adompha or the fiend Thasaidon could be thanked for so salutary a riddance; and in consequence, the king of Sotar and the lord of the seven hells were both feared and respected as never before. Only the most redoubtable of men or demons could have made away with Dwerulas, who was said to have lived through a whole millennium, never sleeping for one night, and crowding all his hours with iniquities and sorceries of a sub-tartarean blackness.

Following the inhumation of Dwerulas, a dim sentiment of fear and horror, for which he could not altogether account, had prevented the king from revisiting the sealed garden. Smiling impassively at the wild rumors of the court, he continued his search for novel pleasures and violent or rare sensations. In this, however, he met with small success: it seemed that every path, even the most outré and tortuous, led only to the hidden precipice of boredom. Turning from strange loves and cruelties, from extravagant pomps and mad music; from the aphrodisiac censers of far-sought blossoms, the quaintly shapen breasts of exotic girls, he recalled with new longing those semi-animate floral forms that had been endowed by Dwerulas with the most provocative charms of women.

So, on a latter night, at an hour midway between moonfall and sunrise, when all the palace and the city of Loithé were plunged in sodden slumber, the king arose from beside his concubine and went forth to the garden that was now secret from all men excepting himself.

In answer to the cobra-like sibilation, which alone could actuate its cunning mechanism, the door opened to Adompha and closed behind him. Even as it closed, he grew aware that a singular change had come upon the garden during his absence. Burning with a bloodier light, a more torrid radiation, the mysterious air-hung globe glared down as if fanned by wrathful demons; and the plants, which had grown excessively in height, and were muffled and hooded with a heavier foliage than they had worn priorly, stood motionless amid an atmosphere that was like the heated breath of some crimson hell.

Adompha hesitated, doubtful of the meaning of these changes. For a moment he thought of Dwerulas, and recalled with a slight shiver certain unexplained prodigies and necromantic feats performed by the wizard. . . . But he had slain Dwerulas and had buried him with his own royal hands. The waxing heat and radiance of the globe, the excessive growth of the garden, were no doubt due to some uncontrolled natural process.

Held by a strong curiosity, the king inhaled the giddying perfumes that came to assail his nostrils. The light dazzled his eyes, filling them with queer, unheard-of colors; the heat smote upon him as if from a nether solstice of infernal summer. He thought that he heard voices, almost inaudible at first, but mounting anon to a half-articulate murmur that seduced his ear with unearthly sweetness. At the same time he seemed to behold amid the stirless vegetation, in flashing glimpses, the half-veiled limbs of dancing bayaderes; limbs that he could not identify with any of the graftings made by Dwerulas.

Drawn by the charm of mystery and seized by a vague intoxication, the king went forward into the hell-born laby-

rinth. The plants recoiled gently when he neared them, and drew back on either side to permit his passage. As if in arboreal masquerade, they seemed to hide their human scions behind the mantles of their new-grown leafage. Then, closing behind Adompha, they appeared to cast off their disguise, revealing wilder and more anomalous fusions than he had remembered. They changed about him from instant to instant like shapes of delirium, so that he was never quite sure how much of their semblance was tree and flower, how much was woman and man. By turns he beheld a swinging of convulsed foliage, a commotion of riotous limbs and bodies. Then, by some undiscerned transition, it seemed that they were no longer rooted in the ground but were moving about him on dim, fantastic feet, in ever-swiftening circles, like the dancers of some bewildering festival.

Around and around Adompha raced the forms that were both floral and human; till the dizzy madness of their motion swirled with an equal vertigo through his brain. He heard the soughing of a storm-driven forest, together with a clamoring of familiar voices that called him by name, that cursed or supplicated, mocked or exhorted, in myriad tones of warrior, councilor, slave, courtling, castrado or leman. Over all, the sanguine globe blazed down with an ever-brightening and more baleful effulgence, an ardor that became always more insupportable. It was as if the whole life of the garden turned and rose and flamed ecstatically to some infernal culmination.

King Adompha had lost all memory of Dwerulas and his dark magic. In his senses burned the ardor of the hell-risen orb, and he seemed to share the delirious motion and ecstasy of those obscure shapes by which he was surrounded. A mad ichor mounted in his blood; before him hovered the vague images of pleasures he had never known or suspected: pleasures in which he would pass far beyond the ordained limits of mortal sensation.

Then, amid that whirling fantasmagoria, he heard the screeching of a voice that was harsh as some rusty hinge on the lifted lid of a sarcophagus. He could not understand the words: but, as if a spell of stillness had been uttered, the whole garden resumed immediately a hushed and hooded aspect. The king stood in a very stupor: for the voice had been that of Dwerulas! He looked about him wildly, bemazed and bewildered, seeing only the still plants with their mantling of profuse leafage. Before him towered a growth which he somehow recognized as the *dedaim,* though its bulb-shaped bole and elongated branches had put forth a matted mass of dark, hair-like filaments.

VERY slowly and gently, the two topmost branches of the *dedaim* descended till their tips were level with Adompha's face. The slender, tapering hands of Thuloneah emerged from their foliage and began to caress the king's cheeks with that lover-like adroitness which he still remembered. At the same moment, he saw the thick hairy matting fall apart upon the broad and flattish top of the *dedaim's* bole; and from it, as if rearing from hunched shoulders, the small, wizened head of Dwerulas rose up to confront him. . . .

Still gazing in vacuous horror at the crushed and blood-clotted cranium, at the features sered and blackened as if by centuries, at the eyes that glowed in dark pits like embers blown by demons, Adompha had the confused impression of a multitude of people that hurled themselves upon him from every side. There were no longer any trees in that garden of mad minglings and sorcerous transmu-

tations. About him in the fiery air swam faces that he recalled only too well: faces now contorted with malign rage and the lethal lust of revenge. Through an irony which Dwerulas alone could have conceived, the soft fingers of Thuloneah continued to caress him, while he felt the clutching of numberless hands that tore all his garments into rags and shredded all his flesh with their nails.

The Temple Dancer

By SEABURY QUINN

An unusual story, about a white girl in a Hindoo temple, and the loving arms of the gracious lady that protected her on the night when she was to become the Bride of Siva—a tragic tale

1. *Sanctuary*

THE smell of tiger, rancid, acrid, vaguely terrifying, hung in the humid breeze that eddied through the flower-laden boughs of fromager and banyan. Northward sounded the shrill trumpet of an elephant, taken up and mockingly repeated by the gibbons chattering in the bamboo thickets. Superheated, heavy with sweet-scented air as a greenhouse with its fires banked high, the jungle hummed and whispered with mysterious little voices, now shrill, now dull and muted, that seemed to be but echoes in a vast, all-conquering silence.

The man who dragged the bullock's nose-string paused to draw a tattered shirt-sleeve down his face from brow to chin and turned a wistful smile upon the woman huddled in the cart. "Courage, dear heart," he whispered. "It can't be many miles until we reach a station, then——"

She looked at him with eyes deep-set and drawn, their glaze of misery intensified by lines of pain that etched her cheeks, but the tragic look upon her face was lightened by a smile of tenderness that drew the corners of her suffering mouth a little upward. "It can't be very far away, dear love," she answered as a spasm seemed to rack her. "I can feel——"

Her lower lip began to quiver and she caught and held it firm between her teeth. Despite her brave attempt at courage a deep, heart-wrenching groan welled from her throat, and he could see the corded muscles stand like lines of sudden white against her sweat-drenched neck.

"Please, God, dear pitying God, let it be delayed until we reach a settlement—until we come to human beings!" the man besought as he turned and tugged once more upon the bullock's lead-string. A more than half-forgotten prayer of childhood came into his mind:

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild . . ."

What was the next line? "Look upon this little child"? He wasn't sure, and in an effort to recapture memory he threw his head back, gazing thoughtful-eyed across the mud flats bordering the sluggish river. "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild

—what's that? Oh, God be praised, a building!"

Out of the green distance, not more than two or three miles off, there rose the bone-white towers of a temple. Its walls were meshed in writhing greenery, clutched and bound and fettered in a strangling net of creeping vines and reaching, snake-like roots, but jungle-bound as it might be, it was the symbol of a human habitation. If he could make it before . . . he set his teeth and bowed his shoulders as he urged the weary little taurine steed to greater haste.

Like advance waves of a slowly flooding sea the jungle verdure washed across and all but drowned the remnants of the stone-paved causeway reaching from comparatively solid ground across the slime-encrusted swamp moat to the temple gateway. The green-scummed waters swarmed with life which spanned the gap from infusoria to amphisbenia and lapped against a wall of square-hewn stones as massive as the bastions of a fortress. At the roadhead rose a triple flight of stairs, each set divided from the others by a platform nine feet square, carrying out the symbolism of the mystic three times three. Above the final landing arched a gateway piercing through a wall of uncemented masonry with carven elephant heads set

"Butea-Jan, sole surviving candidate of the ordeal, must prove her fitness to be married to the god she served."

as supports on either side and three tiaraed faces, broad-nosed, blank-eyed, passionless and pitiless, sculptured at its crest, one facing south, one east, one west. "Siva," the man whispered as he looked up at the great impassive faces. "Siva the Destroyer! I thought——"

His words were broken by a low-voiced greeting: "I bid the strangers welcome to the habitation of the Gods." A man with shaven head, robed in a yellow gown and bearing in his hand a yellow-tufted staff, bowed from the gateway's arch. He was taller and more strongly built than the average Annamese, and his skin was scarcely darker than a brunette European's. Across his forehead, heightened by the shaving of his scalp, there stretched the horizontal bars of red and white which symbolize the followers of Siva.

"Is there anybody here who understands — who has skill in medicine?" the man requested breathlessly. "My wife——"

"Enter," bade the other calmly. "We have seen your coming from afar; your reception is prepared and there are those with skill to tend your wife."

"It's all right, darling," whispered the young husband as he lifted his half-fainting wife from the crude cart. "We've come upon a Hindoo temple in the jungle, and the high priest says they can take care of you. You'll be safe, now, and the baby——"

The moan of agony which came unbidden from the tortured woman's lips cut through his reassurance, but she smiled despite her pain and raised her hands to stroke his cheeks as he took her in his arms. "My own," she whispered falteringly, "if I should not——"

He hushed her with a hurried kiss and bore her quickly up the ninefold steps.

Through the arching opening of the gateway he could see the courtyard of the temple, heat-drenched and golden-bright beneath the fierce Cambodian sun; he saw the serried rows of doorways leading to the cells where dwelt the priests and temple women, and the high-doored shrine where the effigy of Siva the Destroyer sat in sullen menace in the everlasting half-light. This he saw above the woman's head as he paused for breath upon the topmost landing, but the sun which shone directly from the zenith cast no warning shadows of those who lurked behind the doorway's opening, their eyes fixed on the high priest's lifted hand. He set the woman gently on her feet and clasped his right arm around her, steadying her halting walk, and as they stepped across the temple threshold the priest brought down his hand.

There was a flash of metal as four spears thrust simultaneously. The man relaxed his grip about the woman's shoulders, stumbled blindly a half-faltering step and sank down on his face without a sound. A little lake of swiftly spreading crimson stained the stones beneath his breast, and before it reached a half-foot past his body there came a swarm of jewel-hued flies to settle at the edges of the swelling pool and suck the ruddy fluid up with greedy thirst.

The pain-racked woman dropped upon her knees beside her stricken husband. "David!" she called softly. "David, my belovèd!"

That was all. Neither tear nor scream came from her as she knelt beside her dead, and when the temple janitors laid by their spears and reached to seize her they met no resistance, for she lay as still and flaccid as he whom they had killed.

2. *A Life Begins*

IN SPITE of suffocating heat and stifling humidity, a charcoal brazier glowed inside the little vault-like room where Deborah Fielding lay propped against a

heap of earth and stones, her infant at her breast. Labor, hastened by the shock she had endured, had been short but terrible. In the evil-smelling darkness of the vault, attended by two hags as hideous as the witches from *Macbeth*, she thanked a kindly Providence for the anodyne of pain, since agony of body helped dull the agony of mind and kept her thought from what had happened at the temple gateway. Now, torn and bleeding from the unskilled handling of the unkempt midwives, but with the tides of pain subsiding, the spate of bitter memories swept across returning consciousness.

"David," she moaned weakly. "David, darling——"

The two old hags who squatted by the glowing brazier rose as at a signal and scuttled from the room, taking care to hug the walls that their profaning shadows might not fall upon the man who stood without the doorless entrance. As the jangle of their tawdry ornaments subsided down the corridor the high priest entered and stood looking down at her. Behind him walked a temple janitor, one of the quartet who had struck her husband down three hours before.

Deborah felt no fear, only a revolted curiosity as she looked up at the visitor. "Why have you done this thing?" she asked him weakly. "What harm had we done you?" As she spoke she noticed how his features seemed to match the sculptured faces by the temple gate, almost expressionless, free from any look of hate or malice, devoid of pity as a graven mask.

He bent his gaze upon her in the charcoal brazier's glow, and though she knew he did not move, his eyes seemed to come nearer, to melt and fuse in one gigantic eye which floated through the intervening air until it rested close to hers. It seemed her brain was shrinking, growing numb; the pain that racked her body gradually subsided, and like one who hears a far-off voice come dimly through a semi-sleep she heard him say, "It was no question of revenge. We did the needful. This house is sacred to the Gods and not to be profaned by alien feet. It is the house of secrets, and we cannot have those secrets taken to the cursèd French. Your husband was an offering to Omkar, who is the attribute of Siva in this temple. What is it that you wish most fervently?"

"David," she murmured drowsily. "My husband——"

"Be it so," he interrupted softly. "Go thou to join him in whatever place is his." Gently, but not tenderly, he took the infant from her bosom and nodded to the janitor, who drew his simitar and with practised butcher's skill drew its razor-edge across the half-unconscious woman's throat.

3. The Bulls of Yama

FLAMBEAUX flared with eery blue-green flames about the temple courtyard, sending flickering beams of brightness through the undoored openings of the cells which lined the quadrangle on three sides, casting ever-changing highlights on the sculptured faces of the gods till their fixed, impassive visions seemed to smile approval on the scene below. Against the southern wall of the enclosure sat a row of music-makers, small guitars, gourd-shaped fiddles and kettle-drums upon their laps. A few held tambourines, all were placid as the carven gods above them.

A row of temple women issued from the cells upon the east, small bird-like creatures moving with a graceful, slightly rolling gait and singing in falsetto voices the unending glories of the Great God Siva, Divine Destroyer and titulary deity of reproduction. Ornaments of silver clashed and jangled on their wrists and

ankles, jeweled rings shone in their ears and noses and upon their toes and fingers, chaplets of bright marigold crowned their sleekly oiled and parted hair. Between the double file of women marched a rank of little girls dressed in imitation of their elders, jeweled with silver ornaments, crowned with marigolds. Straight across the courtyard marched the parade till it came to halt before the door of the great shrine where, half visible, yet indistinct and ghostly in the ever shifting light which flickered from the courtyard, sat the four-armed idol of the god. Priestesses and little neophytes marched round the idol singing adorations, and the high priest bathed the sacred image with sweet butter, honey and the juice of sugar cane, finally drenched it with fresh water consecrated by the prescribed prayers. As the bathing-ceremony finished, the small girls tripped forward and fell upon their faces at the great god's feet, holding forth their hands with offerings of marigolds.

Now preliminaries were completed and the business of the night began. The temple women stripped their little charges of their jewelry and gayly-colored robes; so they stood like seven little female cherubs in the flambeaux' light. Six of them had straight black hair and olive skin, the great dark serious eyes which were their racial heritage, and already, though but five years old, showed that precocious development which marks a race whose women flower early and are old before their Western sisters reach their prime. The seventh was as fair as her consorts were dark. Her skin was almost milk-white, her eyes a deep, calm pansy blue; her hair, though dark and almost straight, displayed a tendency to wave. Straight and supple as a lad she stood in lanky young girl grace beside the dark-skinned children. No swelling of the hips or gracious turn of leg proclaimed her sex; in the half-light she might have been mistaken for a little Cupid in a throng of infant Psyches.

Temple janitors led a herd of small white bulls into the antechamber of the shrine. Save in color they were typical of the wither-humped zebu, but a single glance told they had none of the fine gentleness which makes the Indian cattle more like pets than mere domestic beasts. Vicious little creatures these, with fiery, angry eyes, impatient, stamping hoofs and long sharp barbs of brass set on their sloping horns. With cords of twisted cloth, that the bindings might not scar their skins, the little girls were tied between the small bulls' horns, each with her head set back so it rested on her charger's shoulder hump; her feet hung forward till they trailed before his nose; her little abdomen hooped upward from his forehead, where it protruded unprotected.

Now they led a cow across the entrance of the antechamber, her small hoofs clicking daintily against the pavement, and at her scent the bulls went wild, dragging at their leading-cords, turning viciously upon the janitors who held them in restraint. The high priest raised his hand, a gong beat out a sullen, vibrant note, and the men released their charges.

Bellowing defiance at each other the seven bulls swept through the doorway to the courtyard, paused a moment, dazzled by the bright light from the flambeaux, then with unerring instinct made for the seductive little heifer who stood calmly ruminating as she waited the attentions of her suitors.

The foremost bull had reached his object of desire and was emitting a low amatory snort when his nearest rival cannoned into him, and his voice rose in a wrathful bellow. Horn clashed on brass-tipped horn, and rumbling war cries issued from the bovine gladiators' throats. Mingled with the combat bellows of the

bulls came the frenzied shrieks of tortured children as the bayonet-like brass horns gored little legs and arms or drove pitilessly through soft chests and abdomens.

Music rose in wild cacophony from the minstrels squatting by the courtyard wall. Sitars strummed, sarangais wailed like cats in torment, horns shrieked and shouted, tambourines thumped and chattered in sharp cachinnation, and through it all there came the shrill, despairing cries of maimed and dying children.

AN HOUR passed before the high priest gave the signal for the bulls to be restrained and the struggling animals unburdened of their little passengers. They laid the remnants of the children in a row before the idol's base, and took count of the casualties. From one shattered little body came a steady panting whimper as the anesthesia of shock wore off and pain intolerable crept over tortured nerves; a cascade of bright droplets filled another baby's screaming mouth, her eyes were merely blood-filled hollows; skin and flesh had been flayed off another's legs, and from her lacerated sides the white of fractured ribs protruded through the bleeding body. A red-hued little bundle that had once been a small girl bounced and rolled grotesquely on the pavement, the trunk a mass of blood-smeared wounds, arms and legs lying at odd, obtuse angles, each with a double Z-twist in it. Of all the seven, only one seemed to have escaped disfigurement or mortal hurt, the little white girl. Lighter in weight and slenderer in build than her companions, she had been less exposed to ripping, piercing horns, and her steed, less hampered by his burden than the others, had inflicted greater injuries than he had received and managed to come through the conflict with his passenger unconscious but not seriously hurt.

As if they had been so much refuse the broken little bodies were dragged from the shrine, and two temple women raised the white child in their arms, holding her up to the four-armed idol while the high priest thrust a crown of plaited marigolds upon her lolling head and chanted:

"Jae, Jae, Omkar!—Glory and Victory to Omkar, attribute of Siva! Take thou the offering of this woman child, Divine Destroyer, Mighty Recreator. By thee has she been chosen from all others through the ordeal of the Bulls of Yama. Accept her life, her breath, her soul, her body, as all thine. Take thou her as votary and bride. Jae, Jae, Omkar!"

4. *Naikin Bayadère*

BEFORE the divan where the high priest sat, a disk of torchlight glinted on the polished pavement. In the luminous circle stood a figure veiled from hair to feet, head bowed demurely, waiting further orders from the holy one. Eight years' apprenticeship were passed, and Butea-Jan, sole surviving candidate of the ordeal of the Bulls of Yama, must prove her fitness to be married to the god she served. Crouching at the divan's foot the elder naikin bayadère or ballet mistress showed the product of her training, calling out the different tests of the examination.

The eight years had sped swiftly for the girl. As soon as she recovered from the hurts she had sustained while strapped between the fighting bull's sharp horns her schooling had begun. For hours every day she practised the devotional dances, working till her muscles ached as though with rheumatism and the skin was nearly braized from soft bare feet. She learned the gesture dance which required its performer to assume nine hundred and forty-three symbolic postures and hold them rigidly as if she were a statue. She

learned to play the sitar and the tambourine and to sing the adorations or erotic love songs; last of all she learned the dance of Seven Enticements, which is a combination of the Arabs' *danse du ventre* and contortionism, requiring the performer not only to keep time to rapid rhythm with her shoulders, hips, breasts and abdomen, but to bend her head either forward or backward till it touched the floor without raising either heels or toes or assisting herself with her hands.

Now she began the final test, moving slowly forward with gently undulating hips, her slim white feet placed flat upon the floor, one before the other. The veil dropped from her head, showing her arrayed in short tight sleeveless bodice of red silk, gold-embroidered and edged with tiny bells, and a full wide skirt of purple mesh belted at her slender waist with a wide cummerbund of yellow. Her head bent back between her shoulders, eyes closed as if in sleep, lips slightly parted, drooping loosely at the corners. Daintily between her thumbs and forefingers she took up her gossamer skirt, spreading it about her as a lordly peacock fans his tail; her head swayed slowly to the right, then left, like a lotus swaying in a passing breeze; her eyelids slowly parted and she cast a lingering, enticing glance about her. Slowly she stepped forward, setting one foot straight before the other, treading with the second foot exactly in the print left by the first, and her ankle bells made little laughing noises as she moved.

Now the music quickened and the deep chords of the sitar mingled with the sweet, thin strains which came to life beneath the sarangai bow. It wove light patterns round her and she seemed to tread them as the dancing spider hurries over her taut net when the morning dewdrops jewel its strands with diamonds and turn its steel-gray meshes burnished silver. Her little tripping feet ceased moving and came to rest beside each other, heel pressed to heel, great toe against great toe, and a wave of undulating movement seemed to ripple up her body. She might have been Nagaina, Brahma's sacred serpent dancing on her tail to skirling pipe and throbbing kettledrum, or the shadow of a wind-tossed vine against a sunny wall. Her hips rotated as she drew her body back and forth as if it were a bow which answered to the archer's pressure; her shoulders fluttered like the pinions of a bird in flight; her little, firm, hard, newly budded breasts were like a pair of siren hands that beckoned a resistless invitation; the gently swelling rondure of her abdomen rose and fell like water bubbling from a spring amid a desert waste.

The swiftly lilting music stopped and the drummer beat a long roll with palms and fingers. She crossed her arms upon her bosom and slowly, like a tempered blade that bends beneath the swordsman's practised hand, her slim white body curved a backward crescent. Both feet were flat against the floor; there was no reaching for support with groping toes, no raising of the heels, but still her body's arc increased until it seemed her spine or hips must surely crack beneath the strain; then the crown of her sleek head rested on the floor. The drummer's roll continued, growing soft and softer in a slow diminuendo, and seemingly without the slightest strain or effort she rose until she stood upright, then bowed her head submissively, joined her hands palm pressed to palm, the fingers pointing down, and intoned ritualistically: *"Jae, Jae, Omkar!* —Victory and Glory to Omkar!"

5. *Bridal Night*

SHE was acceptable to Siva! With songs and laughter they made ready for her bridal. They dressed her in a gorgeous robe and draped a gold-embroidered sari over her. Marigolds—flowers sacred to the gods—were bound in chaplets round her head and fetters of the same bright flowers joined her wrists together. A golden awl was brought to pierce her nostrils and in the right-hand wound they hung a three-inch loop of gold, while a ruby stud bright as the blood that trickled from the little hole the gold awl made was set into the left side of her nose. The silver rings were taken from her ears and in their place were set long pendants of gold fringe with little scintillating emeralds swaying from each golden tassel. Upon her wrists they loaded bangles, some gold, some silver, and on each ankle they hung heavy bands of gold from which there rippled golden wire fringe so long it almost hid her feet and showed no more than henna-painted toes and heels each time she stepped. With drums and flutes and thrumming sitars they moved before her to the shrine of Siva, and there they stripped her gorgeous raiment off but left her jewels to accent her fair whiteness. A bridal bed of glowing roses had been laid before the idol, and on these she lay supine, the dewy scarlet petals touching her with light caresses while the cruel curved thorns pierced deep into her tender skin till little gouts of blood ran down and mingled with the flowers' brilliant color.

Last of all they brought an unsheathed simitar which they laid lengthwise on her body and bade her clasp the hilt between her breasts. She did not know it, but the blade which rested on her bare white flesh was that which took her mother's life the night that she was born.

SINCE times which human memory failed to reach, the Great God Siva in his milder aspects had accepted mortals as his wives, and generation after generation of young girls had been espoused to him in ceremonies similar to that Butea-Jan had gone through. Only legend told of brides who had beheld their divine bridegroom, but miracles are the commonplaces of the gods; so though the vision of the heavenly spouse might be denied his mortal wife it was a well-attested fact that never had a maiden lain upon the rose-strewn bridal bed and risen virgin the next day. Butea-Jan was heathen through and through. Such learning as she had concerned the gods and goddesses of Hindooism's pantheon; the stories of the various Immortals' peccadillos were familiar to her as are nursery rimes to Western children, and the training which was hers since infancy had left her under no misapprehensions as to woman's place and function in the Oriental social scheme. It no more occurred to her there might be something shocking or immoral in this concept of physical union between god and worshipper than it would occur to a devout young Christian to say the sacrament of the Communion seemed like anthropophagy. She hugged the sharp-edged simitar against her and closed her eyes in silent adoration of her heavenly spouse. The climax of her short life had been reached; the thing for which she had endured long hours of rigorous training, scoldings, beatings, every species of abuse, was finally about to happen. She was the bride of Siva. Soon she would be his wife.

A quiet of sepulchral hush lay on the sanctuary. The little lizards whose small feet ran scuttering like the rustling of dry, wind-swept leaves were silent in their holes; even Nag the sacred cobra rested in his burrow, filled to satiation with his evening meal of buffalo milk

topped off by a luckless rat which had chanced to cross his path. Butea crossed and uncrossed her slim ankles and pressed the naked sword blade closer. The aphrodisiac effect of pain induced by rose thorns tearing at her skin swept through her like a potent drug. She closed her eyes more tightly to shut the darkness out. Soon he would appear, the heavenly bridegroom. Soon!

A lisping, lightly shuffling step upon the sanctuary's polished pavement, so soft that only ears attuned to catch the faintest sound could hear it; a faint glow, staining rather than lightening the abysmal darkness of the shrine . . . Butea's little body became rigid. She closed her eyes more tightly and thrust her head a little forward. A flush of quickly mounting blood ran up her throat and cheeks, her lips fell open and a smile spread on them. Gently, scarcely noticeably, she arched her body at the hips; her hands released their rigorous grip upon the sword hilt and fluttered upward till they hovered a few inches from her face as if to clasp the cheeks of one who bent above her. From between her little milk-white teeth there came a sigh of ardent happiness. . . .

6. *Swami Rama Pal*

SWAMI Rama Pal, high priest of Siva, had not always been in holy orders. Though a Brahmin and a member of the twice-born priestly caste, time was when he had cherished visions of political preferment, of success at the bar, a seat in the All-Indian Parliament, perhaps an undersecretaryship. His family was impoverished as many high-caste families were, but somehow funds were found to send him out to England where, after making fair but far from brilliant grades at a fourth-rate public school, he matriculated in the law school of a great commercial city's university. Oxford, Cambridge, or even London, were beyond his family's budget, but a degree was a degree and carried due distinction in the land of his nativity. But the law of torts and contracts, the utter fairness of the English criminal jurisprudence, the inherent honor underlying chancery practise were things his devious mind could not lay hold on. Why should a man be penalized for bettering himself in bargaining? he wondered. Is not all trade based on one man's ability to cheat another? And why should perjury be called a crime? Did they actually believe a man would tell the truth to his own disadvantage, even though he called his gods to witness, these strange Englay?

So when examinations were completed he had a stationer print cards announcing, "Rama Pal, Failed LL.B.," and went back to his homeland, where after the prescribed observances he was considered purified from the defilement of his ocean voyage and was once more privileged to wear beneath his English shirt the triple-stranded thread known as the junwa, insignia of the twice-born Brahmin.

There were ways in which a clever fellow could make money, for advice in legal matters was a merchantable quantity, even though the one who sold it lacked credentials at the bar, and there were quite as many ways of spending money as there were of making it. A girl, for instance. Not particularly pretty, certainly not smart, but indubitably white; a maid who came to India in the service of a railway *sahib's* wife. To be seen in pin-striped trousers and an only third-hand morning coat in company with a white girl was decidedly a feather in his cap, but the railway *sahib's* wife objected to the girl's dark admirer, and when a stalwart young private from a Yorkshire regiment began to walk out with the little wench the triumph he had felt at social

recognition from the *sahib-log* turned gall and wormwood in his mouth.

Appointment to a minor post in the police came next, but here again his gift for intrigue proved disastrous. Natives in his district were fanatical believers in the old religion; when a wealthy money-lender died his heirs at law and next to kin decided that his infant widow must become *sati*. Great preparations had been made; the bazars were searched for the ceremonial *marhra* cloth of silk and cotton to shroud the little victims; jewels of silver, brass and tinsel finery were obtained, pinch-beck necklaces and bangles, everything to aid the noble spectacle of a nine-year-old child burned upon her husband's funeral pyre. The rumor of these preparations could not well escape official ears, but Rama Pal was all in sympathy with the arrangement. Was he not a Brahmin, and did not *sati* bring again the golden age to Hind, the Hind that flourished long before the Englay came to ravish and oppress? Besides, the dead man's relatives were rich and more than willing to pay handsomely for temporary blindness on his part. So the rite was carried out and the child died to the accompaniment of her shrieks of agony and the pious shouts of relatives of her departed husband.

The judge *sahib* was most unreasonable. He spoke of loyalty to the British Raj, of duty which would make a man turn on his race and coreligionists if they proposed to break the Englay's law, and of other similar incomprehensible things. Also he sentenced Rama Pal to five years penal servitude.

Impoverished and embittered, Rama Pal came from the jail to face a world turned upside down. As an ex-convict, almost every avenue of work save those forbidden by restrictions of his caste was closed to him; starvation stared him in the face when he procured a gown and staff and set out on a pilgrimage to Mandhatta. Here Siva ruled as Omkar, not the mild god of reproduction, the patron of the arts and great ascetic, but the lustful lord of terror and destruction, consort of dread Kali, who rejoices in blood-sacrifices and finds the immolation of a human victim most acceptable of all.

They celebrated *kurban*—human sacrifice—while he worshipped at the shrine of Siva Omkar, and when he saw the fated body hurtle from the tall cliff to the jagged rocks below Rama Pal felt a sudden fierce elation flow through him. This was his niche in life, this the part the gods had written for his playing! To minister at Siva Omkar's altar, to act as surrogate of him who rules the forces of destruction, to feel himself in tune with that which symbolizes annihilation . . . he was of the priestly caste, the world had played him false; henceforth he would have none of it.

He practised the austerities and gained a name for piety; in contemplation and in fleshly abstinence he found some measure of repose, and in the service of the temple he had honor and contentment. His zeal won approbation and his skill at gaining increased offerings from the faithful commended him to those who ruled the cloisters of the priests.

IN COCHIN-CHINA and Cambodia the French were beating back the jungle. Northward, where for centuries the tiger and the elephant were undisputed lords, the paddy fields were creeping, the unfamiliar pattern of white roads was laid. As always when cheap labor is required in the East, great throngs of Hindoo coolies swarmed to help reclaim the jungle-smothered land. Time was when mighty temples rose amid Cambodian jungles to the Hindoo triad, especially to Siva the Destroyer. The mighty piles of Angkor Vat were raised to do him honor. But

Buddhist heresy crept through the land till, though the faces of the gods still looked down from their temple walls, there was none to do them honor and their worship had become a memory. Now with the influx of a Hindoo population there would be worship given to the ancient ones and the temples which had been so long deserted would once again resound with hymns and sacred music; once more the blood of sacrifice would flow; again the incense pots would smoke before the symbol of the lingam, where sterile women prayed for sons and men grown old and impotent besought the god for offspring. Swami Rama Pal was sent as high priest to a reclaimed temple in the jungle of Cambodia.

To the jungle country came two earnest workers in the vineyard of the Lord. David and Deborah Fielding had heard the call to preach the Gospel to the heathen, and in a festering swamp they set their little chapel up and expounded the Glad Tidings as authorized by the Mennonite Church. Reared in the absolute democracy of a Pennsylvania village, caste seemed to them to be direct affront to God, and David, who possessed a gift for languages, was eloquent in denunciation of the system. The Hindoo laborers, low caste to a man, were thrilled to hear his message of emancipation. His roll of converts grew apace, and as it grew the offerings at the temple waned.

Swami Rama Pal took counsel with himself. In times gone by the Englay had offended him, refused to give him a degree, spurned his attentions to their women, imprisoned him. Now one of the accursed race denounced his god and lured his worshippers away. His spies informed him that the Missionary *Baba* was to have a child within the month; arrangements were all made to send her down to Saigon, but the Missionary *Sahib* would remain to spread his poison doctrine.

The night before the Missionary *Baba's* going, both church and parsonage burned down, and when David and Deborah took stock of their possessions they found that all they had was one small bullock cart, a little draft-bull and the clothes they stood in. Home, clothing, money, furniture, were gone, and every servant had deserted. Although his conscience smote him for deserting under fire, David knew Deborah must have skilled assistance quickly; so sorrowfully he took the bullock's lead-string and set out for the nearest settlement.

The Swami knew their progress step by halting step; he was ready at the gateway when the wretched little caravan appealed to him for help. When the spearmen thrust he exclaimed, *"Jae,* Omkar, *kurban!*—To Omkar the Sacrifice!" When they told him Deborah had been delivered of a girl his plan was ready formed:

The Englay woman like her husband should be *kurban* to Omkar. As for her child . . . those who found favor in Lord Siva's sight were taken as his brides. The priest was Siva's surrogate on earth. . . .

Swami Rama Pal paused at the sanctuary entrance. Through the darkness gleamed the girl's pale body on its bed of roses, white and sacrificial as an ivory corpus on a crucifix of ebony. His breath came quicker, his lips were dry as those of one who tramps an arid desert. He flicked his tongue across them, swallowed once and stepped into the shrine. Here he was master absolute. No power in earth or sky could thwart his purpose. . . .

7. *"Rockabye, Baby!"*

The soft step sounded nearer on the temple's tessellated pavement. Butea knew the part she was to play. From babyhood she had been schooled in wo-

man's rôle, the rôle of one who makes of love an art and a vocation, one to whom the rites of love are both a means and an end. Painstakingly she had learned the nine and seventy lubricities, those sweet enticements of eroticism which are the stock in trade of naikin bayadères. Rose thorns ripped the tender skin which sheathed her calves as she gently parted her crossed feet; like little spikes of torment other thorns thrust in her back as she spread her arms up with an eager, hungry gesture.

The glow that gilded the dense blackness of the sanctuary strengthened. Was it the aureole of divine effulgence shining from her heavenly spouse? Despite the warning that the bride who looked on Siva's face unbidden would afterward be blind, she raised her long-fringed lids the tiniest fraction of an inch. Two faces looked out from the semilucent gloom, one dark, the other almost lily-white.

The darker visage she knew instantly: Swami Rama Pal. From infancy she knew that calm, impassive face, that high-bridged nose, that wide high forehead, those full expressive eyes. To her the face was symbol of the almost unattainable, the earthly revelation of Lord Siva's godhead. But never had she seen it as she saw it then. Its olive swarthiness had drained to sickly gray, the chin and mouth were thrust forward, lips pressed taut on teeth; the brows, always so calm with other-worldly composure, were drawn down in a V until the tri-barred sign of Siva rippled in a triple-lined serration; the tranquil eyes were venomously narrowed. It was an angry face, a rageful face, the face of one gone almost mad with hate and fury, but it was also frightened. Every down-drawn line and unaccustomed wrinkle was eloquent of bafflement and unbelieving, wrathful fear. Its stiff lips writhed across the teeth slowly, sluggishly, like worms that are half animate with frost, and the voice that issued from them was a whispered scream: "Hast thou come back to rob me of my triumph, O slug-spawned woman of the Englay?"

Butea turned her startled glance upon the other face. It was a woman, young by Western standards, with a mouth bespeaking sensitiveness and courage, eyes clear and soft and steady, sad but not angry, slightly dewed with tears, but unafraid. They bent upon the Swami now, those clear, clean Western eyes, inexorable as an accusing conscience.

He seemed to wilt and wither under their fixed gaze. Twice he licked numb lips with a stiff tongue, three times he sought to call upon the potent name of Siva the Destroyer, but only little hissing noises as of frightened breath escaping from fear-burdened lungs came forth. At last, like one who backs from an accusing Nemesis and dares not turn his eyes away lest it devastate him utterly, the Swami gave ground slowly, slinking through the darkness of the shrine till his feet encountered the rough pavement of the courtyard.

Not till then did he turn round, and when he turned he ran, ran like one pursued by demons till he found the safety of his cell where he fell half fainting on his couch and prayed with fluttering breath and gabbling lips to Siva for protection from this Englay thing which spanned the stretchless void of darkness from some unbottomed hell to come back in its worldly form, not reincarnate as the soul of every living thing must be by order of the gods.

Butea looked with awe upon the vision. It seemed to be a woman, yet unlike any woman she had seen. The skin was fair, as fair as hers, the eyes of that same shade of blue for which the temple women mocked her. Around it glowed a gentle light, not bright and fearsome, not flick-

ering as from destroying fire, but cool, unwavering, like moonlight shining on the woman's bathing-pool when the Lady Uma sails her silver boat across the cloud-waved ocean of the sky.

"Who art thou, Mighty One?" Butea asked. "Art thou Parvati, consort of Lord Siva, come down in jealousy because he takes me as his mortal bride? Have mercy, Gracious Lady. It was he who sought me through the ordeal of the Bulls of Yama; I did not thrust myself——" Her prayer sank to a little moan of terror. There was a frantic feeling in her breast above her heart, her breath seemed strangling her. She had seen the temple women's jealous rages, had seen them rush screaming, scratching, biting at each other. If mortal envy was so terrible a thing, what would the vengeance of an outraged goddess be?

Soft hands were on her cheeks, a smooth palm brushed her forehead. She trembled as the vision brought its sweet calm face to hers, fearing rending teeth, but when cool soothing lips were pressed against her brow Butea knew a peace the like of which she never had felt before. Kissing is a Western import into India; in all her life Butea had never seen or felt a kiss, and she thrilled to the caress. There was a sweet and lovely perfume emanating from the vision, not pungent like the scent of musk, not acrid like the smoke of incense, not sweet and cloying like the perfume of the jamun or the kush-kush, but vaguely, indefinably lovely. And now she felt what she had never felt before, a pair of arms clasped round her, an elbow crooked behind her head, the pillow of a sweet soft breast beneath her cheek. Something like a gasp of pain came from the visitant as Butea turned a sleepy head and her nose-hoop came in contact with the bosom where she rested, but the exclamation died half uttered, and she heard strange, alien words crooned over her: "Daughter—little daughter!"

Butea felt the weight of sleep upon her lids. Half consciously she realized she should be on her knees before the heavenly visitor with her forehead pressed against the floor, but it was very sweet to lie there in those folding arms, sweet to listen to the crooning chant the like of which no Hindoo sanctuary ever heard before:

"Rockabye, baby, on the treetop,
When the wind blows the cradle will rock,
When the bough bends . . ."

Butea-Jan, new made naikin bayadère, mortal spouse of mighty Siva the Destroyer, slept her bridal night away in a peace surpassing understanding.

8. *The Swami Asks a Boon*

In the flat expanse of green-scummed marsh that held the jungle in abeyance at the rear of the temple three vultures fought above the remnants of a carcass. Hovering at the jungle's edge, appetites contending with inborn discretion, jackals waited for their betters to complete their feast. The meat was raw and bloody where simitar-sharp beaks ripped through it; when denuded bones appeared they showed oddly grotesque points and angles. The skull, stripped naked of its fleshly envelope, was smashed and flattened. All was food—the gift of bounteous Vishnu—that came the vultures' and the jackals' way; they took the gift the gods provided with no question of its origin, but an anatomist passing by would have classified the broken skeleton as human, and female.

Twelve hours earlier the *kurban* had been celebrated. Siva Omkar the Destroyer was displeased and demanded human sacrifices. Not once but many times within the past three years the Mighty One had told his priest the Swami Rama Pal that only *kurban* could propitiate his wrath. The victims had gone willingly—

until the moment of the fatal leap—for death in honor of the god insured an entry into *kailas,* the paradise of Siva, the dwelling-place of Brahm, Creator of the Universe, and assured the low-caste votary that she need not be born again.

Sometimes victims had been chosen from the women of the coolies; more often they came from the ranks of temple women, for it was not fitting that the fourth-caste scum be given many opportunities at heaven. When the choice was from among the women of the temple it was made by lot, and Swami Rama Pal presided at the drawings. His face remained impassive as girl after girl drew forth the blood-red disk that named her the thrice-favored one, but in the silence of his cell he raged against the unseen warden who kept Butea from the disk of fate. The Swami had some skill in jugglery and more than once he so arranged the lots that it seemed impossible for Butea to fail to draw the disk of death, yet each time disappointment stung him like a salted lash; at every lottery she drew a disk of white, unspotted bone.

Before the altar of his god the Swami crouched, his forehead to the floor. "O Omkar," he besought, "grant but this single favor, only this and nothing more. Let thy servant see the Englay woman's spawn dashed shapeless on the stones; let him see the agony of fear spread in her face as circles widen when a stone is cast into the pool. Grant him but this single boon, great Mighty One. Take thou his life, decree that he be born again a louse, a maggot or a woman. Make his incarnations twenty times ten hundred thousand, but in exchange give him to see the Englay woman's brat go down to death!"

Froth bubbled from the corners of his mouth, his eyes were glazed like those of one new dead, purple bruises showed upon his forehead where he beat his brow against the paving-stones before the altar.

"Grant, O Omkar, grant!" he panted. "Give me this boon. Just this, no more. 'Tis all I pray!" A shudder shook him as he lay prostrate upon the tiles. He moaned and choked, then stiffened as with sudden cold.

Out in the swamp the vultures, glutted to satiety, rose in awkward flight like overloaded airplanes. Jackals, grown brave at their departure, rushed in with yapping cries to haggle snarling for the remnants of the feast.

Swami Rama Pal lay corpse-stiff on the stones before the effigy of Siva Omkar.

9. *Evening in Saigon*

RICHARD LANGLEY pushed his empty coffee cup away, dropped a quarter inch of cigarette ash in it and took a sip of Chartreuse. Through the insulation of his interest in the scene before him the persistent, slightly querulous objections of his vis-à-vis came faintly. Langley did not want to listen to the numerous good reasons the Inspector had for desiring him to give his sketching project up. He had been through India making sketches of pre-Buddhistic religious architecture; the less known ruins of Cambodia would complete his work. He was anxious to be finished and go home; just at present he desired to see the sights of Saigon. It was interesting, this town which France had built upon foundations older than the Pyramid of Cheops. From the jungle, never far away in Cochin-China, the tom-toms throbbed with the monotonous insistence of a giant pulse. Night had fallen thick and hot, moonless and impenetrable, but the arclights blazed like monster fireflies on the Rue Catinat, picking out the passers-by as a theater spotlight picks out characters upon a stage: native soldiers, trig and trim in dark blue

tunics and straw helmets, Annamite women walking with the easy grace of flowing water, colonial officials and their wives, moist in limp pongee or wilted crêpe georgette, pretty little ladies come all the way from France to be amusing. The air was filled with Eastern scents, the smell of flowers and spice and the dank, thick heat that rolled up from the Saigon River like a cloud of unseen steam.

"Eh?" Langley turned from contemplation of the ever changing panorama. "I beg your pardon, Inspector, I didn't hear."

Inspecteur Georges Jean-Josèphe Marie Renouard of le Service de Sûreté Général heaved a gusty sigh of resignation. Name of a dog, they were all mad, these artists! When they were American, to boot . . .

"I said, *Monsieur,*" he pronounced carefully, like one who would impress his meaning on a child of sluggish wits, "I said it would be better if you should postpone your expedition to Cambodia for a week or two."

"But I can't wait," objected Langley. "My ship sails in two weeks, and I must complete my work——"

"Then go to Angkor Vat, my friend. There are ruins to delight the heart of any man, a veritable heaven for the archeologist."

"I'm not an archeologist. I'm an architect, and I'm especially interested in the older Hindoo temples. Angkor's been so much exploited lately that it's lost its novelty. Besides, I think that I'm more likely to find what I want in the smaller, earlier ruins—those built before the reign of Paramacevera which show no Buddhist influence. I've heard that there's a place not far from Kampong Thom which the Hindoos themselves think so authentic that they've rededicated it to——"

"I do not think you should go there, *Monsieur.*" The Inspector's tone was unaccented, but something in his voice and the level stare from his dark eyes conveyed a warning.

"Why not?" Annoyance fought with curiosity in Langley's question.

"Because of many things, some known, some guessed at, some to be discovered. I shall journey northward in a week or so. Will not you wait and go with me?"

"You think I need a police escort? I've always heard the Annamites were friendly."

"The Annamites, yes. Occasionally they rob, sometimes they kill, but one cannot call them definitely criminal. The temple which you speak of is not Annamite, but Hindoo; its priests, its staff of hangers-on, its worshippers are of a different race. I do not think the place is very healthy for the lonely traveler. No. Certainly."

Langley was amused at the Inspector's earnestness. "I've traveled all through India," he answered, "and I never met with anything but courtesy from the natives. Even at the great temple of Madura the gurus were most friendly."

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders, smoothed his iron-gray pompadour and tugged thoughtfully at his imperial. "Attend me, if you please, my friend," he ordered. "I am Renouard, and when I say a thing is so, that thing is surely so. I do not like that temple or its ruling priest; most of all I do not like the stories which I hear about it. Sixteen years ago a Monsieur and Madame Fielding, missionary countrymen of yours, set out from their small mission chapel to come to Saigon. We know they left, we know they went alone, we have traced their journey to that temple's gate. Afterward" —he raised his shoulders in another shrug and puffed his cheeks as one who blows a candle out—*"je ne sais quoi."*

"You think——"

"Tiens, c'est drôle ça. Me, I am a

policeman. I am not paid to think. *Mais non,* it is that I must know."

"But you don't know——"

"Tu parles, mon ami, but I can think, I can imagine, I can suspect, can I not? *Regardez"*—he leveled a blunt finger like a gun for emphasis —"walls have ears, my friend, and for the Sûreté they have lips, as well. Some rumors have come to me, rumors which if I understand them right I hope to be untrue. I have been told that in this *sacré* temple there is one who dances for the honor of the monkey-visaged gods as never bayadère danced before, one who dances like a flame blown in the wind, like moonbeams on swift flowing water, like the twinkling of a star in the quiet midnight sky. Also, *Monsieur,* these indubitably lying rumors say that though her hair is black it is as fine as thrice-split silk, that her skin is fair as milk and her eyes like violets in the springtime. How came she there? I ask to know."

"But you don't know," argued Langley. "You just said——"

"I do not know, yes; but I shall know all soon, I assure you in all confidence. I shall go to see the priest who rules this temple in the jungle, I shall reason with him——"

"Reason?"

"Perfectly. With a platoon of Trailleurs Annamites and machine-guns, perhaps a howitzer, as well. Oh, believe me, my friend, they understand such reasoning perfectly, these *canaille."*

"Who is she, have you any idea?"

"Mais cela parle tout seul. Madame Fielding the missionary lady was in great haste upon her trip; it was for medical assistance she came. It is in my mind she bore a daughter in that temple and that this so mysterious white dancer is she. In any case, you will agree she has no business there, *n'est-ce-pas?"*

"H'm, I suppose so," Langley granted. "Still, you can hardly come down on a peaceful temple with a squad of soldiers and machine-guns just because you suspect that——"

"Ha, can I not? You make the grave mistake, believe me. This is French territory; we have here no foolish notions such as those of England and your own illustrious country. Here every man is presumed guilty of all crimes to be imagined till he proves his innocence. If things transpire as I think and this dancer is the daughter of the missionary lady, a crime has been committed in that her birth was not recorded. Besides——" He caressed his beard in moody silence till Langley prompted:

"Yes?"

"There is another matter. The Sûreté's ear is very keen, its arm is very long. We have heard some most unpleasant things about that temple, things stringently forbidden by the *code criminel,* things which have to do with Siva Omkar and his sacrifices. You apprehend?"

"Can't say I do."

"No matter, perhaps it is as well. At any rate, it would please me greatly if you should delay your visit till I am ready to depart."

"Is that an order, sir?"

"An order? No, merely a request."

"Then I'm sorry, Inspector. I know you are sincere in your objections, even though I think you are mistaken. But it's imperative I catch the next ship home. I'll promise to be careful and do nothing which could give offense to the Hindoos——"

"Tiens, my friend," the Frenchman shrugged again. "I know your breed. Short of putting you in physical restraint there is no way to dissuade you from this madcap expedition. *Bien.* Shall we be going?"

As they left the Café de la Republique Libérée he dropped a step behind and

beckoned to a figure lurking in the shadows. "Observe him, *mon petit* Kim-Kien," he ordered, nodding toward the young American. "Have him always in your sight; when he walks you walk, when he runs, run you also; when he sleeps you wake, and if he promises to get in mischief, as he almost surely will, see that I have due and timely notice. You comprehend?"

"Bien oui, mais certainement, Monsieur l'Inspecteur," whispered back the Annamite.

"Très bon. À bientôt. Allez!" Renouard rejoined.

10. Beside the Lotus Pool

BUTEA-JAN stood knee-deep in the limpid water of the women's bathing-pool. Lotus blossoms nodded on tall pliant stems around her, their pearl-pink mirrorings picking up and accenting her sweet delicacy of coloring in the water's glassy speculum. At the border of the pool a knot of iris bloomed and the purple blueness of their tufted petals was an echo of her eyes. She had loosed her wealth of blue-black hair so it fell in wavy cataracts across her creamy shoulders as she bent to cup a double handful of clear water up and lave her arms with it. More lovely than a Venus carved by Praxiteles she was as she swayed above the dimpled pool at dawnlight, slim rounded limbs, firm young breasts, skin like lustrous bride-white satin underlaid with rose all glowing with the water she splashed over them. She hummed a passage from the Râmâyana, India's ancient love-lied, as she bathed:

> "For the faithful woman follows
> Where her wedded lord may lead,
> In the banishment of Râma
> Sita's exile is decreed . . ."

But her thoughts were not upon the royal lovers of the olden days. There was more to think of in the present.

Naikin bayadères had other things to do than dance and sing devotions to the gods. It was a portion of their sacred duty to fare forth upon occasion for the entertainment of such nobles as could pay the fees the priests demanded. Often, if their beauty and attainments were sufficient, they remained as inmates of the noble's purdah, honored, pampered, preferred before their hosts' first mates, having all the attributes and honors of a wife without her obligations; for the nobles who supported them in luxury might not kill or even beat them for infraction of their household discipline, since they belonged to Siva and injury to divine property was sacrilege almost as great as killing of a Brahmin. Butea knew that she was beautiful. The polished silver mirrors of the women's quarters told her so, the cool reflection of the bathing-pool attested it. She knew that she was skilled in dancing and in singing the devotions, for if nothing else proclaimed her talent the other women's jealousy was proof enough. Yet when such few among the Hindoo population as could pay the temple's fees demanded entertainers from the sacred purdah, Butea-Jan was never sent. She alone of all the bayadères had never left the temple precincts, she was the only one in all the company of dancers who had never felt a man's hand laid on her in love.

"Am I uncouth and poorly formed?" she demanded of the charming image staring at her from the bathing-pool's clear surface. "Am I one-eyed, noseless, leprous, that men should pass me by and choose others in my stead? Must I grow old and fall like rotten fruit, with none to taste my sweets——" The lotus blossoms brushed her dimpled knees as she stepped a little farther in the pool, re-

garding her reflection with tear-misted eyes.

"*Om mani padme hum*—O thou jewel of the lotus!" Softly spoken, the hail came from atop the vine-draped wall set as a rampart against the jungle's onward march. *Om mani padme hum*, Butea knew, was the universal Buddhist salutation to the Lord Gotama, and since the Buddha had scorned caste and even doubted that the gods existed, to chant his praises in a Hindoo temple was almost as great a sacrilege as slaughtering a sacred cow inside the holy compound. She looked up in quick fear. The Annamites were Buddhists, and there had been disputes between them and the Hindoo immigrants, arguments often pointed with the sting of knife blades. Had one of these come here to offer insult?

"*Jae*, Omkar," she began an invocation, but paused with eyes and lips agape. Across the green-draped wall there peered a face like no face she had ever seen. Despite its overlay of tan and freckles, it was white, and the eyes that looked from it were blue and bright and merry. A curling thatch of copper-colored hair topped it, not umber like that of wandering holy men who dyed their hair with henna, but vivid, fiery, vital as spun metal come to life. Also, the stranger smiled at her, and his smile was like none she had ever seen. Smiles, in her experience, showed malice or amusement, sometimes both, but this one displayed friendly kindness. Vaguely, a memory stirred in her. Clearly, the visitor was of a different race from that with which she was familiar, and his skin, though different, was strangely like her own. Only once before had she seen such features and complexion in another than herself . . . the Gracious Lady who appeared to her the night she married Siva Omkar, the heavenly one who held her in her arms and sang strange, soothing words. Butea's knees felt weak, her breath came hot and fast with awe. If this were another heavenly visitant, and he had found her unadorned, without so much as nose, or ear-rings . . .

With a quick, unconscious modest gesture she crossed her arms above her little, high, young, pointed breasts, the open palm of a slim hand cupped upon each shoulder. Her eyes were bright with wondering fear, but more of curiosity than terror showed in them as she whispered haltingly: "Be pleased to turn thy star-like gaze from thy handmaiden, Mighty One, till she can greet thee fittingly." Her voice had a soft richness alien to the Hindoo woman, a sweetly modulated alto come to her through generations of mixed German-English ancestry.

"All right, gorgeous," the vision said, then, at her look of wonder at his foreign words, "Make haste to attire thee fittingly, O maiden, but tarry not too long, for I would speak with thee."

FEARFULLY, Butea raised her forehead from the pavement and gazed in wonder at this visitant from outer worlds. In the little interval since he had come she had arrayed herself in short, tight, sleeveless bodice, a full, sheer skirt of many plaits, a gold-edged sari of black net and all the jewelry she possessed until she tinkled musically at every slightest movement. "Has thy servant attained favor in thy sight, O Heaven-born?" she asked timidly.

"I'll say you have—yea, verily," the sunny-haired visitant answered. "How are you called, O maiden of the iris eyes?"

"Butea-Jan, my lord, and never have I felt the touch of man, for they say that I am ugly and unpleasing— —"

"They do, eh? Well, go tell 'em to laugh this off!" A pair of strong white

hands were hooked beneath her armpits and she felt herself drawn upward till she stood on tiptoe. Again that surge of memory . . . around the heavenly stranger hung the same sweet, cleanly fragrance she had smelled the night the Gracious Lady came to her. She wondered, then ceased wondering, for his arms were round her shoulders and his lips were pressed to hers.

Only once before had Butea felt a kiss; then it was on her forehead. Now, as the god-like stranger joined his mouth to hers, a curtain seemed to draw across the sun and a pounding as of distant surf seemed booming in her ears. She was fighting for breath—drowning. Her heart was quivering and jerking like a doe that feels the huntsman's spear bite deep into her vitals. She groaned softly, as if in agony unbearable, and went limp within his arms. For a long heart-stilling moment she lay helpless as the dead in his embrace; then her arms went about his neck, pulling his lips more tightly against hers. Between her half-closed lids he saw the shimmer of her eyes, deep pansy-blue, worshipping, entreating. "O my heart," she panted, drawing soft palms downward on his cheeks, "O soul of my soul's soul! Droppings from the honeycomb, sweetness of pomegranates in the summer, let me die! Let Butea die before this happiness has ended!"

11. "Till Death Us Do Part"

ROUND and bright as an exchange-worn coin the moon climbed slowly up the ladders of the sky, flinging down a cascade of pale argent light that silver-plated wall and tower and shimmering pool and fromager and waving bamboo frond. In shadows lay the tall slim reeds, vague and indistinct the tufted iris nodded at the bathing-pool's far edge, but the moonlight drenched the open lotus buds in silvery radiance, made fallen, floating petals little vermeil-gilded ships, made a royal robe of silver tissue of Butea-Jan's white sari. Langley leant his back against the mhowa tree and hummed a snatch from Lehmann's *Rubáiyát* suite:

> "Ah, moon of my delight that knows no wane,
> The moon of heav'n is rising once again.
> How oft hereafter rising shall she look
> Through this same garden—after me in vain."

The girl moved closer to him. Through her thin draperies he could feel the throbbing of her heart. "I'm afraid—afraid, O Heaven-born," she whispered. Her hands stole upward to his cheeks and pressed them. "Look at me, soul of my soul's soul!" she softly bade, but her eyes were closed.

Langley drew his arm around her quivering shoulders, patting her bare arm with gentle, clumsy reassurance. "Be not affrighted," he consoled; "there is nothing here to fear."

She moaned softly, as in pain, and laid her cheek against the roughness of his flannel shirt.

"Why do you call me Heaven-born?" he asked. "What makes you think I am an avatar of Krishna and not a man like other men?"

"Thy smell, my lord, the heavenly perfume you exude," she answered. He could feel the coolness of her nose-hoop on his throat as she pressed her face against the open collar of his shirt.

"Smell?" he asked, bewildered. "You mean—oh"—quick laughter pinched the skin around the corners of his eyes as he realized he'd doused his newly shaven face with lavender before he set out from his camp to keep his assignation at the temple—"what makes you think the perfume heavenly?"

"Its aura hung about the Gracious Lady

when she visited thy servant, Mighty One."

"The Gracious Lady? Who the deuce was she?"

Timidly, self-consciously, like a child who takes her little treasures from their hiding-place to show them to a loved grown-up, Butea told the story of her bridal night and of the heavenly presence who held her in her arms when she had driven Rama Pal away.

"Good heavens!" Langley whistled softly when the tale was done. "This is the most amazing thing I've ever heard . . . those missionaries . . . it would be about the time . . . you're just about sixteen . . . you don't recall your mother, do you, child?"

"Thou art my father and my mother, and Butea is thy slave," the girl responded simply.

"H'm, yes, of course," he nodded in abstraction. "And old Monkey Face was all set to make passes at you, eh? See here, my dear, I think you'd better come away with me. Would you like that?"

"Does the shadow pause to speak of likes and dislikes when the sun sinks in the west, or the fallen petal talk of its desires when the wind embraces it, my lord?"

"But you don't understand. I want to take you home with me; home to America. I want to—oh, hang it all, you're the loveliest thing I've ever seen—will you marry me, Butea?"

"Marry? You would make the *nika* with me—take Butea to wife——"

"By heaven, I'd give my soul to do it!" Moved by a sudden inexplicable impulse, he drew his class ring off and slipped it on her left third finger. "Till death us do part, belovèd," he whispered as he kissed the slim white finger where the ring reposed.

Her eyes were misty, almost visionless, but they never wavered in their steady gaze on his as she drew a gorgeous emerald from her thumb and put it on the place left white against the sunburn where he had worn his class ring since his student days. "Till death us do part, O heart of my heart's heart," she echoed dreamily. Then: "Is Bûtea now the chosen consort of her lord?" she asked, half hoping, half incredulous.

"I'll tell the heavens and the earth you are!" he answered. "If anyone——"

Her quivering mouth was on his mouth, her arms gleamed whiter than her moon-enameled sari as they crept about his neck, drawing him down to the sweetness of her lips, the warmth and pulsing of her bosom.

SOUTHWARD four hundred miles Georges Jean-Josèphe Marie Renouard, Inspecteur du Service de Sûreté Général, read the dispatch just placed upon his desk, tugged at his beard and swore with Gallic fluency. Kim-Kien his native spy had been efficient, but four hundred miles is still four hundred miles, and when more than half of it must be traversed by relayed native runners before the Government telegraph at Kampong Thom can forward it—name of a dog, *le bon Dieu* only knew what dire things had occurred since Kim-Kien sent that message on its southward way!

"Enfant!" he called the little orderly who lounged, cheroot in mouth, outside his cabinet. "My compliments to Capitaine Molière. Tell him it is that I must have three planes with bombers and machine-guns tuned up and ready at the airport within the quarter-hour. *Allez, tout vite!"*

12. *"Greater Love Hath No Man . . ."*

"ART ready, heart of roses?" Langley leaped down from the wall and looked about the shadowed garden by the bathing-pool. "Where art thou, Butea mine?" His glance shot questing through the shifting darkness where the iris bloomed, searched the shade cast by the mhowa tree, scanned the deeper dimness where the tall reeds nodded whispering together. "Butea, Butea-Jan, where art thou?"

"I'm sorry, Langley Sahib, Butea-Jan will not be able to accompany you." Tall, austere, lean to skeletal emaciation, Swami Rama Pal stepped from the shelter of the mhowa tree and smiled unpleasantly. "Even in your country, my dear sir, it's not considered just the thing to lure another's wife away. Butea happens to be the wife of Siva, and unfaithfulness on her part is a grave breach of decorum. As for you"—his gently mocking manner fell away as though it were a veil ripped off and innate malignancy, bitter, acid, poisonous, shone like the reflection of a soul consumed in hell-fire on his face—"as for you, adulterer, woman-stealer, thief of innocence, we have means to deal with you——"

Langley took a quick step forward, but before he could advance a foot strong hands were on his elbows, others grasped his neck, a stick was thrust between his legs and twisted. In a moment he lay trussed as neatly as a fowl, Rama Pal regarding him sardonically.

"There are a number of gateways for the soul to take departure," the priest said almost musingly. "There is the death of twenty thousand cuts invented by our Chinese brethren. In it the executioner begins his slicing at the feet and takes an upward cut a minute till a vital spot is reached. I have been told it is elaborate in discomfort. Then there are swarms of hungry ants to be attracted to a body pegged down to the ground and smeared with honey; or if that seems somewhat crude, we have my lord the elephant to help us. Did you ever see the body of one trod to death by elephants, Langley Sahib? It is really rather comical. The broken bones stick through the flesh, the entrails gush out like the inside of a rotten fruit that's fallen to the ground, the skull is mashed flat as a muffin——"

"Stop, stop, my lord, have mercy! Be merciful to him and I——" From a knot of temple women gathered in the background Butea struggled forward and threw herself upon her knees before the priest.

Langley looked at her with mounting horror. They had taken off her gorgeous costume and clothed her in a single garment of coarse cotton, a rough woven sari of cheap muslin almost as crude as burlap. Her jewels were taken from her, her lovely hair was hacked away until it stood in stubbly fuzz upon her almost naked skull, her face and throat, her arms and breast and shoulders, had been daubed with filth and ashes. On one arm, clasped just above the elbow, was an iron band, the Hindoo widow's bracelet, symbol of lost caste, dishonor and disgrace. Her wrists were bound together by a twist of rough hemp cord, and as she held her hands up to the priest in supplication Langley saw the raw wounds which the spiny fiber bonds had rubbed against her tender skin.

"Adulteress, strumpet, what have you to offer in exchange for this one's life, you whose doom is ready written in the book of fate?" Rama Pal threw the insults at her as he might have hurled a missile at a dog. A titter sounded from the women as he raised his foot and spurned her, but

she propped herself up awkwardly upon bound hands and crept toward him on her knees.

"If—if thou wilt spare him I will be *kurban!*" she cried gaspingly. "*Kurban* to Siva Omkar!"

The Swami's scowling face grew thoughtful. Time and again he had endeavored by every means within his devious powers to force this girl to immolate herself, but always he had failed. Some unseen but insuperable guardian had always thwarted him. Even now, when she was taken in the very act of fleeing with her Englay lover, he dared do no more than degrade her. Much as he would have liked to kill her by slow torture, he dared not face that spectral countenance, those calm, accusing eyes that routed him the night Butea had become the bride of Siva. But if the girl went voluntarily to death, if she gave herself a willing sacrifice to Omkar, surely the dead Englay woman's ghost could not come back from *jahannam* to haunt him for her murder. Here was the answer to his fervent prayers! As for letting Langley Sahib go . . . who was to hold him to his promise when Butea had become *kurban?* Can last year's hurricane rip away the roof, or does one thirst today because of yesterday's hot sun? Can the dead demand fulfillment of a compact?

"Be it so," he said, then, to the assembled temple servants: "Butea-Jan the naikin bayadère makes herself a voluntary offering to Siva Omkar. At the rising of tomorrow's sun she will become *kurban.*"

"COME, thou who seek'st to enter *kailas* through the merits of the *kurban* made to Siva Omkar!" Deeply resonant the Swami's hail sounded at the entrance of the sanctuary, and Butea rose from her prostration at the idol's feet. All night she had lain stretched upon the stones and prayed to every god the Hindoo pantheon contained that happiness should go with Langley Sahib when he left the temple the next morning, that he might bear her image in his heart and not forget her utterly. Now the time was come to pay the price of his deliverance, and she rose unhesitatingly, bowed once more before the symbol of the lingam and came out into the sunlight. Horn and drum burst in a salutation to her as she stepped across the threshold of the sanctuary and the women crowded around her, holding out their rings and necklaces and bracelets for her touch. However much they hated her white skin and purple eyes, however envious they were of her ability to dance and sing devotions, she was *kurban* now and holy. Her lightest touch upon an ornament made it a lucky amulet.

The Swami headed the procession. On each side of Butea walked a temple janitor, brave in brightly colored costume, the strengthening sunlight glinting on his spear, his simitar a-jangle at his waist.

Three times around the courtyard they proceeded, then halted at the foot of the tall tower by the gateway from the top of which the three impassive faces of Lord Siva looked sightlessly across the jungle.

Against the eighty-foot gate-tower bamboo ladders had been placed so Butea could ascend the highest tip of the great sculptured god's tiara, and at the ladders' lowest rung Swami Rama Pal came to a halt, tendering the girl the ceremonial betelnut wrapped in lime and pipal leaf, signifying her relations with the world were ended.

Butea waved it back. "One minute, one minute with him ere I take the leap," she pleaded, and the Swami bowed in acquiescence. This was even more than he had hoped. To see the heartbreak in their faces, to see the tears of parting dim their eyes—and to know that when the sacrifice was made the Englay's blood would dye

the courtyard stones as that other cursèd one's had stained them on the day Butea came into the world.

"Do not quite forget Butea, heart of my heart's heart," the girl besought. "In that outer world of thine when fair women look into thy eyes and speak their love to thee, hold one little corner of thy heart for memories of our nights beside the pool——"

"Butea-Jan, belovèd, do not do it!" Langley begged. "Let us go together, if we must, dear, fighting——"

"Ah, no, my heart of roses, that is not to be," she interrupted. "They would only bear thee down by force of numbers and then kill thee with the foulest torments. Me they would also surely slay, so I must die in any case. This way I give thee all that I have left to give, and can go to *kailas* happy in the thought that I have bought thy life with mine. Take not that little comfort from me. Is it not better one should die than two? Is it not sweet to know Butea loved you, even to the death? But come, we have but little time to say farewell. Take me in thy arms again and kiss me, if so be thou hast the courage to caress a thing so shorn of beauty as I am. Tell me that you love me, that you will not forget——" She threw herself into his arms, and in a storm of tears he kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her close-cropped head, her throat, her trembling, avid lips.

"Do not watch me mount the steep," she pleaded; "do not look as I perform the leap. Think only this, remember this of Butea, nothing more——" She joined her mouth to his, pouring all the hopeless passion of a thwarted love into a last long kiss.

"The time is overdue!" The Swami's summons broke the long embrace, and with a shuddering sob Butea dropped her arms from Langley's shoulders and without a backward glance began to mount the bamboo scaffolding.

Langley tried in vain to look away, but the slender white-robed figure toiling up the swaying ladders drew his eyes as to a magnet. Higher, higher, she ascended. Now they saw the flutter of her sari as she stood atop the minaret-tower of Siva's carven crown. A wreath of marigolds fluttered down from her left hand; it struck the pavement with a soft impact, and every watcher in the sun-drenched courtyard gave a sharp involuntary shudder. In another moment . . .

The girl raised both arms, like a diver poising for a plunge from a high springboard, swayed a dizzy second, white against the bright blue sky, then slowly, stiffly, tilted forward.

Despite the callous background of their cruel religious training the temple women screamed and clutched their throats and the men closed their eyes tightly—all but the Swami Rama Pal. Bright with triumph, his eyes were on the slender figure as it hurtled through the air, his lips set in a taut, fixed smile, every line of his dark face an etching of elation. *"Kurban!"* he shouted frenziedly. *"Kurban! Jae, Jae, Kurban!"*

The impact of her fall was like a giant hand slapped on the stones. Not very loud, not crunching, as Langley had anticipated. When he dared look he saw her lying in a little heap, her clothing hardly disarranged, one arm bent under her, her face—thank kindly heaven!—turned away. Through the meshes of her coarse white sari a bright stain was welling; on the stones around her other stains were spreading fast. Weak and sick, sicker far at heart than stomach, he leant against the wall. "Greater love," he sobbed, "greater love hath no man than this . . ."

"Kill him, kill the Englay!" Swami Rama Pal strode forward, one hand ad-

vanced, his brows drawn down, mouth working as though he chewed upon the bitter cud of hatred. "Slay him lest he tell the French——"

Far away, but growing louder every second, came the drone of airplane motors. Now they showed against the blue Cambodian sky, small as silver gnats, swift pursuit planes streaking with the speed of minnows, growing larger, nearer . . . nearer . . .

Four temple janitors advanced, spears leveled, but a fifth leaped before Langley, sword upraised. "Nay, brothers, hold thy steel!" he shouted. "Think ye that the French would come if they knew not this man is here? They have missed him and are flying to his rescue. Soon they will be upon us, and the guns that stutter death will speak. Heed not the Swami's words, we cannot keep the secret of the blood which he has spilled. Do ye wish to perish on the guillotine?

"Speak well of me and tell the French I had no part in this day's doings, *Sahib,*" he whispered as his knife slashed Langley's bonds. "Do thou go forth and signal to thy friends, lest they loose the guns upon us. I will hold these men in check until the planes have come."

Langley cast a last look at the little broken body lying on the courtyard stone; then weeping like a broken-hearted boy he staggered through the temple gate and stood upon the causeway leading through the swamp.

The great emerald which Butea had placed on his finger flashed a green glint of sardonic malice as he raised his hand to wave a signal to the airplanes circling overhead.

The Singer in the Mist

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

At birth a witch laid on me monstrous spells,
  And I have trod strange highroads all my days,
  Turning my feet to gray, unholy ways.
I grope for stems of broken asphodels;
High on the rims of bare, fiend-haunted fells,
  I follow cloven tracks that lie ablaze;
  And ghosts have led me through the moonlight's haze
To talk with demons in their granite hells.

Seas crash upon long dragon-guarded shores,
  Bursting in crimson moons of burning spray,
And iron castles ope to me their doors,
  And serpent-women lure with harp and lay.
The misty waves shake now to phantom oars—
  Seek not for me; I sail to meet the day.

The Eyes of the Mummy

By ROBERT BLOCH

A fascinating story of flashing jewels and an old Egyptian tomb—a story with a strange and terrible climax

I MAY as well tell the truth. It's easy enough to hint of "hideous horrors" and "forbidden mysteries" when dealing with fictional characters, but in a narrative where the protagonist is one's self, there's a difference—a dreadful difference.

Nor can I hope to tell this story in the way I wish to tell it. My impulse is to set down that damnable revelation; to scream it out in all its mocking clarity that denies sanity to what is left of my life. But this I must not do, for without the proper explanation no one would understand me or believe. Then again, I must fight against the impulse for my own sake. I want to write, clearly and coherently, a natural exposition of all the events leading up to this evening. In that way alone can I restore my own shaken belief in my lucidity.

The account properly begins on the day I decided to leave for Egypt. And yet, do you believe in Destiny? If so, then you will agree, as I do, that there were dark roots in the past which nurtured tonight's flowering of horror.

Egypt had always fascinated me; Egypt, land of antique and mysterious secrets. I had read of pyramids and kings; dreamed of vast, shadowy empires now dead as the empty eyes of the Sphinx. It was of Egypt that I wrote in latter years, for to me its weird faiths and cults made the land an avatar of all strangeness.

Not that I believed in the grotesque legends of olden times; I did not credit the faith in anthropomorphic gods with the heads and attributes of beasts. Still, I sensed behind the myths of Bast, Anubis, Set, and Thoth the allegorical implications of forgotten truths. Tales of beast-men are known the world over, in the racial lore of all climes. The werewolf legend is universal and unchanged since the furtive hintings of Pliny's days. Therefore to me, with my interest in the supernatural, Egypt provided a key to ancient knowledge.

But I did not believe in the actual existence of such beings or creatures in the days of Egypt's glory. The most I would admit to myself was that perhaps the legends of those days had come down from much remoter times when primal earth could hold such monstrosities due to evolutionary mutations.

Then, one evening in carnival New Orleans, I encountered a fearful substantiation of my theories. At the home of the eccentric Henricus Vanning I participated in a queer ceremony over the body of a priest of Sebek, the crocodile-headed god.* Weildan, the archeologist, had smuggled it into this country, and we examined the mummy despite curse and warning. I was not myself at the time, and to this day I am not sure what occurred, exactly. There was a stranger present, wearing a crocodile mask, and events were precipitated in nightmare fashion. When I rushed from that house

* See *The Secret of Sebek*, in WEIRD TALES, November, 1937.

into the streets, Vanning was dead by the priest's hand—or fangs, set in the mask (if mask it was).

I cannot clarify the statement of the above facts; dare not. I told the story once, then determined to abandon writing of Egypt and its ancient ways for ever.

This resolve I have adhered to, until tonight's dreadful experience has caused me to reveal what I feel must be told.

Hence this narrative. The preliminary facts are simple; yet they all seem to imply that I am linked to some awful chain of interlocking experiences, fashioned by a grim Egyptian god of Fate. It is as though the Old Ones are jealous of my pryings into their ways, and are luring me onward to a final horror.

For after my New Orleans experience, after my return home with the resolution to abandon research into Egyptian mythology for ever, I was again enmeshed.

PROFESSOR WHEDAN came to call on me. It was he who had smuggled in the mummy of Sebek's priest which I had seen in New Orleans; he had met me on that inexplicable evening when a jealous god or his emissary had seemed to walk the earth for vengeance. He knew of my

"The jewels had hypnotized the gazer and forced him into that terrible change."

interest, and had spoken to me quite seriously of the dangers involved when one pried into the past.

The gnome-like, bearded little man now came and greeted me with understanding eyes. I was reluctant to see him, I own, for his presence brought back memories of the very things I was endeavoring to forget for ever. Despite my attempts to lead the conversation into more wholesome channels, he insisted on speaking of our first meeting. He told me how the death of the recluse Vanning had broken up the little group of occultists that had met over the body of the mummy that evening.

But he, Weildan, had not forsaken his pursuit of the Sebek legend. That, he informed me, was the reason he had taken this trip to see me. None of his former associates would aid him now in the project he had in mind. Perhaps I might be interested.

I flatly refused to have anything more to do with Egyptology. This I told him at once.

Weildan laughed. He understood my reasons for demurring, he said, but I must allow him to explain. This present project of his had nothing to do with sorcery, or mantic arts. It was, as he jovially explained, merely a chance to even the score with the Powers of Darkness, if I was so foolish as to term them such.

He explained. Briefly, he wanted me to go to Egypt with him, on a private expedition of our own. There would be no personal expense involved for me; he needed a young man as an assistant and did not care to trust any professional archeologists that might cause trouble.

His studies had always been directed in recent years toward the legends of the Crocodile Cult, and he had labored steadily in an effort to learn of the secret burial-places of Sebek's priests. Now, from reputable sources—a native guide in his pay abroad—he had stumbled onto a new hiding-place; a subterranean tomb which held a mummy of a Sebekian votary.

He would not waste words in giving me further details; the whole point of his story was that the mummy could be reached easily, with no need of labor or excavation, and there was absolutely no danger, no silly truck about curses or vengeance. We could therefore go there alone; the two of us, in utter secrecy. And our visit would be profitable. Not only could he secure the mummy without official intervention, but his source of information—on the authenticity of which he would stake his personal reputation—revealed that the mummy was interred with a hoard of sacred jewels. It was a safe, sure, secret opportunity for wealth he was offering me.

I must admit that this sounded attractive. Despite my unpleasant experience in the past, I would risk a great deal for the sake of suitable compensation. And then, too, although I was determined to eschew all dabblings in mysticism, there was a hint of the adventurous in this undertaking which allured me.

Weildan cunningly played upon my feelings; I realize that now. He talked with me for several hours, and returned the next day, until at last I agreed.

WE SAILED in March, landed in Cairo three weeks later after a brief stopover in London. The excitement of going abroad obscures my memory of personal contact with the professor; I know that he was very unctuous and reassuring at all times, and doing his best to convince me that our little expedition was entirely harmless. He wholly overrode my scruples as to the dishonesty of tomb-looting; attended to our visas, and fabricated some trumped-up tale to allow

the officials to pass us through to the interior.

From Cairo we went by rail to Khartoum. It was there that Professor Weildan planned to meet his "source of information"—the native guide, who was now admittedly a spy in the archeologist's employ.

This revelation did not bother me nearly as much as it might have if it occurred midst more prosaic settings. The desert atmosphere seemed a fitting background for intrigue and conspiracy, and for the first time I understood the psychology of the wanderer and the adventurer.

It was thrilling to prowl through twisted streets of the Arab quarter on the evening we visited the spy's hovel. Weildan and I entered a dark, noisome courtyard and were admitted to a dim apartment by a tall, hawk-nosed Bedouin. The man greeted the professor warmly. Money changed hands. Then the Arab and my companion retired to an inner chamber. I heard the low whisper of their voices Weildan's excited, questioning tones mingling with the guttural accented English of the native. I sat in the gloom and waited. The voices rose, as though in altercation. It seemed as though Weildan were attempting to placate or reassure, while the guide's voice assumed a note of warning and hesitant fear. Anger entered, as Weildan made an effort to shout down his companion.

Then I heard footsteps. The door to the inner chamber opened, and the native appeared on the threshold. His face seemed to hold a look of entreaty as he stared at me, and from his lips poured an incoherent babble, as though in his excited efforts to convey his warning to me he had relapsed into familiar Arabic speech. For warning me he was; that was unmistakable.

A second he stood there, and then Weildan's hand fell on his shoulder, wheeling him around. The door slammed shut as the Arab's voice rose high, almost to a scream. Weildan shouted something unintelligible; there was the sound of a scuffle, a muffled report, then silence.

Several minutes elapsed before the door opened and Weildan appeared, mopping his brow. His eyes avoided mine.

"Fellow kicked up a row about payments," he explained, speaking to the floor. "Got the information, though. Then he came out here to ask you for money. I had to put him out the back entrance, finally. Fired a shot to scare him off; these natives are so excitable."

I said nothing as we left the place, nor did I comment on the hurried furtiveness with which Weildan hastened our way through the black streets.

Nor did I appear to notice when he wiped his hands on his handkerchief and hastily thrust the cloth back into his pocket.

It might have embarrassed him to explain the presence of those red stains. . . .

I SHOULD have suspected then, should have abandoned the project at once. But I could not know, when Weildan proposed a ride into the desert the follow morning, that our destination was to be the tomb.

It was so casually arranged. Two horses, bearing a light lunch in the saddle-bags; a small tent "against the midday heat" Weildan said—and we cantered off, alone. No more fuss or preparation about it than if we were planning a picnic. Our hotel rooms were still engaged, and not a word was said to anyone.

We rode out of the gates into the calm, unrippled sands that stretched beneath a sky of bucolic blue. For an hour or so we jogged on through serene, if searing, sunlight. Weildan's manner was preoccupied, he continually scanned the monoto-

nous horizon as though seeking some expected landmark; but there was nothing in his bearing to indicate his full intention.

We were almost upon the stones before I saw them; a great cluster of white boulders outcropping from the sandy sides of a little hillock. Their form seemed to indicate that the visible rocks formed an infinitesimal fragment of the stones concealed by the shifting sands; though there was nothing in the least unusual about their size, contour, or formation. They rested casually enough in the hillside, no differently than a dozen other small clusters we had previously passed.

Weildan said nothing beyond suggesting that we dismount, pitch the small tent, and lunch. He and I pegged in the stakes, lugged a few small, flat stones inside to serve as table and chairs; placing our pack-blankets as padding for the latter.

Then, as we ate, Weildan exploded his bombshell. The rocks before our tent, he averred, concealed the entrance to the tomb. Sand and wind and desert dust had done their work well, hidden the sanctuary from interlopers. His native accomplice, led by hints and rumors, had uncovered the spot in ways he did not seem anxious to mention.

But the tomb was there. Certain manuscripts and screeds bore testimony to the fact that it would be unguarded. All we need do would be to roll away the few boulders blocking the entrance and descend. Once again he earnestly emphasized the fact that there would be no danger to me.

I played the fool no longer. I questioned him closely. Why would a priest of Sebek be buried in such a lonely spot?

Because, Weildan affirmed, he and his retinue were probably fleeing south at the time of his death. Perhaps he had been expelled from his temple by a new Pharaoh; then, too, the priests were magic-workers and sorcerers in latter days, and often persecuted or driven out of the cities by irate citizenry. Fleeing, he had died and been interred here.

That, Weildan further explained, was the reason for the scarcity of such mummies. Ordinarily, the perverted cult of Sebek buried its priests only under the secret vaults of its city temples. These shrines had all been long destroyed. Therefore, it was only in rare circumstances like this that an expelled priest was laid away in some obscure spot where his mummy might still be found.

"But the jewels?" I persisted.

The priests were rich. A fleeing wizard would carry his wealth. And at death it would naturally be buried with him. It was a peculiarity of certain renegade sorcerous priests to be mummified with vital organs intact—they had some superstition about earthly resurrection. That was why the mummy would prove an unusual find. Probably the chamber was just a stone-walled hollow housing the mummy-case; there would be no time to invoke or conjure any curses or other outlandish abracadabra such as I seemed to fear. We could enter freely, and secure the spoils. In the following of such a priest there surely were several expert temple craftsmen who would embalm the body properly; it needed skill to do a good job without removing the vital organs, and religious significance made this final operation imperative. Therefore we need not worry about finding the mummy in good condition.

Weildan was very glib. Too glib. He explained how easily we would smuggle the mummy-case back wrapped in our tent-folds; how he would arrange to smuggle both it and the jewels out of the country with the help of a native exporting firm.

He pooh-poohed each objection that I

stated; and knowing that whatever his personal character as a man might be he was still a recognized archeologist, I was forced to concede his authority.

There was only one point which vaguely troubled me—his casual reference to some superstition concerning earthly resurrection. The burial of a mummy with organs intact sounded strange. Knowing what I did about the activities of the priests in connection with goety and sorcerous rituals, I was leery of even the faintest possibility of mishap.

Still, he persuaded me at the last, and following lunch we left the tent. We found the boulders no great hindrance. They had been placed artfully, but we discovered their appearance of being firmly imbedded in rock to be deceptive. A few heavings and clearing away of minor debris enabled us to remove four great stones which formed a block before a black opening which slanted down into the earth.

We had found the tomb!

With the realization, with the sight of that gaping, gloomy pit before me, old horrors rose to mock and grin. I remembered all of the dark, perverted faith of Sebek; the minglings of myth, fable, and grimacing reality which should not be.

I thought of underground rites in temples now given to dust; of posturing worship before great idols of gold—man-shaped figures bearing the heads of crocodiles. I recalled the tales of darker parallel worships, bearing the same relationship as Satanism now does to Christianity; of priests who invoked animal-headed gods as demons rather than as benignant deities. Sebek was such a dual god, and his priests had given him blood to drink. In some temples there were vaults, and in these vaults were eidolons of the god shaped as a Golden Crocodile. The beast had hinged and barbed jaws, into which maidens were flung. Then the maw was closed, and ivory fangs rended the sacrifice so that blood might trickle down the golden throat and the god be appeased. Strange powers were conferred by these offerings, evil boons granted the priests who thus sated beast-like lusts. It was small wonder that such men were driven from their temples, and that those sanctuaries of sin had been destroyed.

Such a priest had fled here, and died. Now he rested beneath, protected by the wrath of his ancient patron. This was my thought, and it did not comfort me.

Nor was I heartened by the noxious vaporing which now poured out from the opening in the rocks. It was not the reek of decay, but the almost palpable odor of unbelievable antiquity. A musty fetor, choking and biting, welled forth and coiled in strangling gusts about our throats.

WEILDAN bound a handkerchief over his nose and mouth, and I followed suit.

His pocket flashlight flicked on, and he led the way. His reassuring smile was drowned in the gloom as he descended the sloping rock floor which led into the interior passageway.

I followed. Let him be the first; should there be any falling rock traps, any devices of protection to assail interlopers, he would pay the penalty for temerity, not I. Besides, I could glance back at the reassuring spot of blue limned by the rocky opening.

But not for long. The way turned, wound as it descended. Soon we walked in shadows that clustered about the faint torch-beam which alone broke the nighted dimness of the tomb.

Weildan had been correct in his surmise; the place was merely a long rocky cavern leading to a hastily-burrowed inner room. It was there that we found the slabs covering the mummy-case. His face

shone with triumph as he turned to me and pointed excitedly.

It was easy—much too easy, I realize now. But we suspected nothing. Even I was beginning to lose my initial qualms. After all, this was proving to be a very prosaic business; the only unnerving element was the gloom—and one would encounter such in any ordinary mining-shaft.

I lost all fear, finally. Weildan and I tilted the rock slabs to the floor, stared at the handsome mummy-case beneath. We eased it out and stood it against the wall. Eagerly the professor bent to examine the opening in the rocks which had held the sarcophagus. It was empty.

"Strange!" he muttered. "No jewels! Must be in the case."

We laid the heavy wooden covering across the rocks. Then the professor went to work. He proceeded slowly, carefully, breaking the seals, the outer waxing. The design on the mummy-case was very elaborate, inlayed with gold leaf and silver patterns which highlighted the bronze patina of the painted face. There were many minute inscriptions and hieroglyphs which the archeologist did not attempt to begin deciphering.

"That can wait," he said. "We must see what lies within."

It was some time before he succeeded in removing the first covering. Several hours must have elapsed, so delicately and carefully did he proceed. The torch was beginning to lose its power; the battery ran low.

The second layer was a smaller replica of the first, save that its pictured face was more exact as to detail. It seemed to be an attempt to duplicate conscientiously the true features of the priest within.

"Made in the temple," Weildan explained. "It was carried on the flight."

We stooped over, studying the countenance in the failing light. Abruptly, yet simultaneously, we made a strange discovery. The pictured face was eyeless!

"Blind," I commented.

Weiland nodded, then stared more closely. "No," he said. "The priest was not blind, if this portraiture is correct. His eyes were *plucked out!*"

I stared into torn sockets which confirmed this gruesome truth. Weildan pointed excitedly to a row of hieroglyphic figures which ornamented the side of the case. They showed the priest in the throes of death upon a couch. Two slaves with pincers hovered over him. A second scene showed the slaves tearing his eyes from his head. In a third, the slaves were depicted in the act of inserting some shining objects into the now empty sockets. The rest of the series were scenes of funeral ceremonies, with an ominous crocodile-headed figure in the background—the god Sebek.

"Extraordinary," was Weiland's comment. "Do you understand the implication of those pictures? They were made *before* the priest died. They show that he *intended* to have his eyes removed before death, and those objects inserted in their place. Why would he willingly subject himself to such torture? What are those shining things?"

"The answer must be within," I answered.

WITHOUT a word, Weildan fell to work. The second covering was removed. The torch was flickering as it died. The third covering confronted us. In almost absolute blackness the professor worked, fingers moving deftly with knife and pryer as he broke the final seals. In the yellow half-light the lid swung up, open.

We saw the mummy.

A wave of vapor rose out of the case—a terrific odor of spice and gases which penetrated the handkerchiefs bound

round nose and throat. The preservative power of those gaseous emanations was evidently enormous, for the mummy was not wrapped or shrouded. A naked, shriveled brown body lay before us, in a surprizing state of preservation. But this we saw for only an instant. After that, we riveted our attention elsewhere—upon the eyes, or the place where they had been.

Two great yellow disks burned up at us through the darkness. Not diamonds or sapphires or opals were they, or any known stone; their enormous size precluded any thought of inclusion in a common category. They were not cut or faceted, yet they blinded with their brightness—a fierce flashing stabbed our retinas like naked fire.

These were the jewels we sought—and they had been worth seeking. I stooped to remove them, but Weildan's voice restrained me.

"Don't," he warned. "We'll get them later, without harming the mummy."

I heard his voice as though from afar. I was not conscious of again standing erect. Instead I remained stooped over those flaming stones. I stared at them.

They seemed to be growing into two yellow moons. It fascinated me to watch them—all my senses seemed to focus on their beauty. And they in turn focussed their fire on me, bathing my brain in heat that soothed and numbed without scorching pain. My head was on fire.

I could not look away, but I did not wish to. These jewels were fascinating.

Dimly came Weildan's voice. I half felt him tugging at my shoulder.

"Don't look." His voice was absurd in its excited tones. "They aren't—natural stones. Gifts of the gods—that's why the priest had them replaced for eyes as he died. They're hypnotic . . . that theory of resurrection . . ."

I half realized that I brushed the man off. But those jewels commanded my senses, compelled my surrender. Hypnotic? Of course they were—I could feel that warm yellow fire flooding my blood, pulsing at my temples, stealing toward my brain. The torch was out now, I knew, and yet the whole chamber was bathed in flashing yellow radiance from those dazzling eyes. Yellow radiance? No—a glowing red; a bright scarlet luminance in which I read a message.

The jewels were *thinking!* They had mind, or rather, a will—a will that sucked my senses away even as it flooded over me—a will that made me forget body and brain alike in an effort to lose myself in the red ecstasy of their burning beauty. I wanted to drown in the fire; it was leading me out of myself, so that I felt as though I were rushing toward the jewels—into them—into something else——

And then I was free. Free, and blind in darkness. With a start I realized that I must have fainted. At least I had fallen down, for I was now lying on my back against the stone floor of the cavern. Against stone? No—against wood.

That was strange. I could feel wood. The mummy lay in wood. I could not see. The mummy was blind.

I felt my dry, scaly, leprously peeling skin.

My mouth opened. A voice—a dust-choked voice that was my own but not my own—a voice that came from death shrieked, "Good God! *I'm in the mummy's body!*"

I heard a gasp, the sound of a falling shape striking the rocky floor. Weildan.

But what was that other rustling sound? *What wore my shape?*

That damned priest, enduring torture so that his dying eyes might hold hypnotic jewels god-given for the hope of eternal resurrection; buried with easy access to the tomb! Jeweled eyes had hyp-

notized me, we had changed forms, and now *he walked*.

The supreme ecstasy of horror was all that saved me. I raised myself blindly on shriveled limbs, and rotting arms clawed madly at my forehead, seeking what I knew must rest there. My dead fingers tore the jewels from my eyes.

Then I fainted.

THE awakening was dreadful, for I knew not what I might find. I was afraid to be conscious of myself—of my body. But warm flesh housed my soul again, and my eyes peered through yellowed blackness. The mummy lay in its case, and it was hideous to note the empty eye-sockets staring up; the dreadful confirmation afforded by the changed positions of its scabrous limbs.

Weildan rested where he had fallen, face empurpled in death. The shock had done it, no doubt.

Near him were the sources of the yellow luminance—the evil, flaring fire of the twin jewels.

That was what saved me; tearing those monstrous instruments of transference from my temples. Without the thought of the mummy-mind behind them they evidently did not retain their permanent power. I shuddered to think of such a transference in open air, where the mummy body would immediately crumble into decay without being able to remove the jewels. Then would the soul of the priest of Sebek indeed arise to walk the earth, and resurrection be accomplished. It was a terrible thought.

I scooped the jewels up hastily and bound them into my handkerchief. Then I left, leaving Weildan and the mummy as they lay; groping my way to the surface with the aid of illumination afforded me by matches.

It was very good to see the nighted skies of Egypt, for dusk had fallen by this time.

When I saw this *clean* dark, the full nightmare force of my recent experience in the evil blackness of that tomb struck me anew, and I shrieked wildly as I ran across the sand toward the little tent that stood before the opening.

There was whisky in the saddle-packs; I brought it out, and thanked heaven for the oil lamp I uncovered. I must have been delirious for a while, I fancy. I put a mirror up on the tent wall, and stared into it for a full three minutes to reassure myself as to identity. Then I brought out the portable typewriter and set it up on the table slab.

It was only then that I realized my subconscious intention to set down the truth. For a while I debated with myself—but sleep was impossible that evening, nor did I intend to return across the desert by night. At last, some elements of composure returned.

I typed this screed.

NOW, then, the tale is told. I have returned to my tent to type these lines, and tomorrow I shall leave Egypt for ever behind me—leave that tomb, after sealing it again so that no one shall ever find the accursed entrance to those subterranean halls of horror.

As I write, I am grateful for the light which drives away the memory of noisome darkness and shadowed sound; grateful, too, for the mirror's reassuring image that erases the thought of that terrifying moment when the jeweled eyes of Sebek's priest stared out at me and I *changed*. Thank God I clawed them out in time!

I have a theory about those jewels—they were a definite trap. It is ghastly to think of the hypnosis of a dying brain three thousand years ago; hypnosis willing the urge to live as the suffering priest's eyes were torn out and the jewels

placed in the sockets. Then the mind held but one thought—to live, and usurp flesh again. The dying thought, transmitted and held by the jewels, was retained by them through the centuries until the eyes of a discoverer would meet them. Then the thought would flash out, from the dead, rotted brain to the living jewels—the jewels that hypnotized the gazer and forced him into that terrible exchange of personality. The dead priest would assume man's form, and the man's consciousness be forced into the mummy's body. A demoniacally clever scheme—and to think that *I* came near to being that man!

I have the jewels; must examine them. Perhaps the museum authorities at Cairo can classify them; at any rate they're valuable enough. But Weildan's dead; I must never speak of the tomb—how can I explain the matter? Those two stones are so curious that they are bound to cause comment. There is something extraordinary about them, though poor Weildan's tale of the god bestowing them is too utterly preposterous. Still, that color change is most unusual; and the life, the hypnotic glow within them!

I have just made a startling discovery. I unwrapped the gems from my handkerchief just now and looked at them. They seem to be still alive!

Their glow is unchanged—they shine as luminously here under the electric torch as they did in the darkness; as they did in the ruined sockets of that shriveled mummy. Yellow they are, and looking at them I receive that same intuitive prescience of inner, alien life. Yellow? No—now they are reddening—coming to a point. I should not look; it's too reminiscent of that other time. But they are, they must be, hypnotic.

Deep red now, flaming furiously. Watching them I feel warmed, bathed in fire that does not burn so much as it caresses. I don't mind now; it's a pleasant sensation. No need to look away.

No need—unless . . . *Do those jewels retain their power even when they are not in the sockets of the mummy's eyes?*

I feel it again—they must—I don't want to go back into the body of the mummy—I cannot remove the stones and return to my own form now- removing them imprisoned the thought in the jewels.

I must look away. I can type, I can think—but those eyes before me, they swell and grow . . . look away.

I cannot! Redder—redder—I must fight them, keep from going under. Red thought now; I feel nothing—must fight. . . .

I can look away now. I've beaten the jewels. I'm all right.

I can look away—*but I cannot see.* I've gone blind! Blind—the jewels are gone from the sockets—*the mummy is blind.*

What has happened to me? I am sitting in the dark, typing blind. Blind, like the mummy! I feel as though something has happened; it's strange. My body seems lighter.

I know now.

I'm in the body of the mummy. I know it. The jewels—the thought they held—*and now, what is rising to walk from that open tomb?*

It is walking into the world of men. It will wear my body, and it will seek blood and prey for sacrifice in its rejoicing at resurrection.

And I am blind. Blind—and *crumbling!*

The air—it's causing disintegration. Vital organs intact, Weildan said, but I cannot breathe. I can't see. Must type—warn. Whoever sees this must know the truth. Warn.

Body going fast. Can't rise now. Cursed Egyptian magic. Those jewels! Someone must kill thing from the tomb.

Fingers—so hard to strike keys. Don't work properly. Air getting them. Brittle. Blind fumble. Slower. Must warn. Hard to pull carriage back.

can't strike higher case letters any more. can't capitalize. fingers going fast. crumbling away in air. in mummy now no air. crumbling to bits. dust fingers going must warn against thing magic sebek fingers grope stumps almost gone hard to strike

damned sebek sebek sebek mind all dust sebek sebe seb seb seb seb se s ssssssss s s s . . . . . .

Forest of Evil

By JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS

A story of many thrills—a tale of weird adventures and dire perils in the Dead Forest of Sanaala

JUNE 23.—There may not be much point in my trying to keep this diary. Our chances of returning alive from this mad expedition are not at all good. Probably it is the instinct of the professional newspaper man that leads me to keep a record of the trip. My old boss on the *Chronicle* used to say that on the Day of Judgment a good reporter would be taking notes on the ceremonies and trying to interview the angel with the trumpet.

It all started when Clive Mason came back after five years in Central Asia. He sat sprawled by my fireplace, his lean face strangely somber: Suddenly he said:

"I think I'm going into the Devil's own back-yard, Jim, and I want company. There's a fortune in it—for those who live."

"What kind of a fortune?" I asked him.

He took a chamois bag from his pocket and tossed two small objects on the table. "Diamonds, Jim. Uncut diamonds. Those two were in Tommy Reardon's pockets when he died. Did you ever hear of the Dead Forest of Sanaala?"

"Never."

"I thought not. Few people outside of Central Asia ever heard of it, and most of them think it's a myth. I happen to *know* that it exists."

"Is that where the diamonds came from?" I asked.

Clive's eyes took on a haunted expression, the look of a man who thinks of things not pleasant to remember.

"It's where I think they came from. The Forest of Sanaala lies deep in Central Asia, beyond the desert, between two of the spurs of the Kurugh Khan mountains. It is the bare and long-dead skeleton of what was once a fertile belt of woodland. The desert nomads believe it to be terribly haunted. Haunted—probably not! But I have reason to believe there may be something there more horrible than anything we have ever known."

"Why?"

"Because young Tommy Reardon went into Sanaala. I know that for a fact. And I saw him when he turned up in Changor three months later. God knows how he got there, for Changor lies across the

mountains, which are unscalable. That was queer, but his condition was stranger. For one thing, he was blind."

"Blind?" I asked.

"Stone-blind. His eyeballs were completely rotted away, and the flesh around the sockets seemed to have been burned by acid. He was absolutely mad, poor devil, raving mad. He died a few hours later. So that was the end of Tommy Reardon—and God alone knows what happened to him, or how he got over the mountains."

There was a lot more to the yarn, of course. Clive hoped that a larger party might get through, that we would find more diamonds, and so on. I thought about it for several days before I decided to go. Now I am writing this in the vermin-ridden main room of an inn in the small and filthy Chinese city of Weh-Li, half across the world from home. The expedition is well under way.

JUNE 24.—Tomorrow we strike out into the desert! We are all ready to leave Weh-Li, five white men and a girl and some twenty Mongol bearers. The girl, Clarice Saunders, should never be with us, but it can't be helped now. She

"The trunk curled back as if in pain."

is the daughter of Peter Saunders, who is second in command of the expedition. He had left her with friends in Shensi province, but she showed up in Weh-li alone this morning and now we have to take her along. At least she's very far from being the helpless type.

Pete Saunders, by the way, happens to be a pretty well known scientist but he is lean and gray and looks more like a soldier of fortune. The other two members of the party are about my own age. Ed Powell is Saunders' assistant, and Larry O'Neill is a young Irishman that Clive picked up in Shanghai because he liked his grin. Larry's idea of heaven would probably be ten drinks, ten fights and ten women every day. Sort of a disturbing element in a civilized place, but likely to come in handy on this journey.

Later in the day—To the list of the obstacles in our way we can evidently add the name of Doctor Paul Schweitzer. He is a big, paunchy man with thick glasses and an arrogant face. Wears faded khaki and a huge sun helmet. He came striding into our inn this afternoon, kicked one of our bearers out of his path, and then stood with his thumbs in his belt and looked us all over. At last he stabbed a thick finger in Clive's direction.

"You are Clive Mason?" he rumbled.

Clive smiled faintly, but did not get up from where he sat on a pile of boxes.

"That is my impression," he drawled.

"I hear that you plan to go to Sanaala. Do not do so! I am on my way there, I have planned this trek for some time, and I do not want you in my way."

"Know any more good jokes?" Clive asked, his drawl more pronounced than ever.

Schweitzer's wide face began to flush.

"*Donnerwetter,* you force me to speak plainly. Keep out of my way, you damned *Schwein!*"

He was really funny, and most of us laughed. I don't know what Clive might have done next, but O'Neill took matters in his own hands. He said something under his breath and heaved his big bulk upright, and then hit Schweitzer squarely on the point of the jaw. Larry caught him as he fell and heaved him out into the muck of the courtyard.

"Shall I sock him again when he recovers?" he asked eagerly.

Clive shook his head. "You've done enough already. I've heard of Schweitzer, and he's a bad actor."

JUNE 25.—Tonight we lie camped in a sandstone depression on the edge of the desert, with our sentry standing silhouetted against the sky above us. I am writing this by the embers of our fire, while most of the rest of the party are asleep. There is our little cluster of tents, and then our twenty bearers sleeping around us in a circle.

These bearers were the only ones we could get who were not afraid to head for Sanaala. They belong to some nomad Mongol tribe and look like bandits, but they'll probably be all right. As a matter of fact, none of them even speaks Chinese except their leader. He is a big Manchu named Lao who looks like an unhung murderer but seems to be a pretty good sort.

The desert nights are cold. Our sentry is keeping himself awake by whistling some plaintive, endless tune with only three notes in it.

Tomorrow we leave all regular caravan routes and plunge into the unknown, an unknown so strange that probably no living man has yet penetrated it and lived to tell the tale.

JUNE 27.—Yesterday was uneventful, but there was some trouble just after we woke up this morning. I heard loud voices, and stuck my head out of the tent

just as Pete Saunders was crawling out of his.

"What's up?" I asked.

"I don't know yet. Look at Lao!"

The big Manchu was in a rage, swearing at two of our bearers in a guttural jargon neither Clive nor Pete could understand. Lao was waving his arms, and then he pointed at the ground. As we crowded around then, we saw what it was.

Footprints! All around and through our camp were strange footprints, the marks of bare feet. In the sand they were not noticeable, but on some patches of crumbling sandstone they were well preserved. Saunders and Lao began to talk in clicking Mandarin, and after a while Pete shrugged and turned away.

"Lao claims the men on guard must have slept during the night," he said, "and that there have been strangers in camp. Let's look over the supplies."

A careful check-up showed that nothing was missing. Clive sat back on his heels and scratched his head.

"It's beyond me," he said. "Those bare footprints were never made by any of our men, but nothing has been taken. Well—the guards will keep awake after this. We'll split the night up into two-hour watches for ourselves, and not trust the bearers alone."

"Think Schweitzer had a hand in this?" I asked.

"Perhaps."

June 28.—I'm too tired to write anything, but there isn't much to put down anyway. We marched and made camp, we ate and we slept. We all took turns standing guard. Clarice Saunders claims she should stand watch also—she's really quite a girl. Stronger than she looks. She hasn't held us up any so far.

We are all on strict water rations, for our route is off all regular trails and God knows when we'll find any wells.

June 29.—Same as yesterday—no excitement. It was hot as the hinges of hell all day. Wish we had more water!

We were sitting around the fire tonight, all smoking and not saying much, when Clarice Saunders turned to Clive.

"Just what do you expect to find, anyway?" she asked. "Diamonds, I know, and perhaps something of scientific value—but what else? What do you think lies behind the Dead Forest?"

Clive hesitated a long time, pulling on his pipe and staring into the embers of the fire. At last he shrugged.

"I don't really know what I expect," he said at last. "I'm thinking of Tommy Reardon's ravings just before he died, but all that may have simply been madness. But it's possible that somewhere nature may be perverted, that strange and terrible forms of life exist. We may find something very queer behind Sanaala."

JUNE 30.—We made an extra long march today, and will probably do the same tomorrow, now that we have become accustomed to the trek. The sooner we reach the Dead Forest the better, for the lonely Kurugh Khan mountains are beginning to bulk along the horizon. There should be water there. We have a very good supply, but still we all feel a little nervous about it.

The camp is a peaceful place at the moment. Our miniature army of bearers sits cross-legged about the embers of their own cook-fire, while one of them plays some sort of funny instrument with only one string. Pete is going over to the guarded pile of water-skins with some sort of purifying powder. He filtered the water carefully before we left, but it was probably none too good at the start. Typhoid or dysentery would be fatal to our——

Later.—Something disastrous has happened. Or rather, we have only just dis-

covered a thing that was done some days ago. Now we know why there were footprints around our camp after that first night!

Pete was busy with the water-skins when I suddenly heard him call for Clive. Something in his voice, a certain harshness, made me walk over also. Pete was holding an open water-skin, and he looked at us with an expressionless face.

"Smell!" he said.

We both sniffed at the open mouth of the skin, and found an acrid vapor that nearly choked us. Clive and Pete simply looked at each other.

"Chlorine!" Pete said at last, "liberated from the water by the powder I just added to purify it. The chlorine comes from salt!"

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean that our water has been salted?"

Pete nodded slowly, his gaunt face suddenly deeply lined.

"Right! Now we know why somebody was prowling around our camp that first night."

"Schweitzer!" Clive said with a grim snap of his jaws. "It must have been one of his men. Don't let the bearers know about this, yet. Let's see how many of the skins are still good—if any."

We found that four of the remaining skins have not been tampered with. Perhaps the intruder was scared off before he finished his work. Anyway, we still have four good skins of water.

"Enough to take us back safely to Weh-Li," Peter Saunders said slowly. "Or enough — used carefully — to carry us about eight days farther. That should take us to the mountains—if we go on."

"We're going on!" Clive said grimly, and his face was harsh.

I think the terrible weight of that decision struck the three of us, for we turned in silence to look at the rest of our party. Clarice Saunders was chatting gayly with Ed Powell as they sat on the sand. The slant-eyed faces of our bearers were contented as they squatted in their customary circle. Larry O'Neill was cleaning his rifle with meticulous care. In all, there were twenty-six people whose fate was affected by Clive Mason's decision. I wonder how many of us will leave our bones here to whiten in the desert!

JULY 1.—As I sit here writing this morning, I can see that a crisis is near. The salted water was discarded before we started this morning, and the moral effect on the bearers was instant and disastrous. Most of them refuse to believe that any ordinary men could have salted our water. We got them going at last, but they were sullen and stubborn and we made poor progress.

There is no chatter, no gambling, no joking in camp tonight. For the most part the bearers sit in sullen silence with their weapons across their knees. A few are talking in undertones and casting occasional glances in our direction. One scar-faced man with one eye is staring fixedly at me. If it comes to a rush, they are four to one against us.

July 2. Morning.—The crisis is here. Now! The bearers have refused to take up their packs, and have gathered in a compact group. Lao is talking to them. Clive has just come back for a minute, and told me:

"You and Powell stay here with the girl, Jim. Keep your guns ready. If they are set on turning back, it may mean a fight for the water. Lao is trying to convince them that the best chance is to push ahead."

Clarice is crouching behind a pack with her rifle ready. She's a cool one, that girl! Lao's talk seems to be falling on deaf ears. O'Neill is trying to bully——

That evening.—Camp is very different tonight. In the first place we have no

light, for our water supply is so desperately low that we dare spare none for our acetylene lamps. Also, we now have only four bearers instead of twenty.

O'Neill tried to browbeat the bearers into resuming the march this morning, which was very foolish. These bandits are not the ordinary coolie. Larry lost his head and poked the nearest man with his rifle butt, and the bearer went for his gun. Larry was a split second quicker.

I still don't know why it didn't start a general scrap, right then. It looked bad, with the bearer dead on the sand and his comrades gathering for a rush.

It finally worked out that Lao and three others have agreed to go on with us. The others have turned back toward Weh-Li, which they will probably never see. We shared our water equally with the deserters, over Larry O'Neill's violent protest. But it was the only way to avoid a pitched battle.

It was nearly ten before we got started this morning, for we had to unpack all our duffle and re-sort it into the number of loads we can now carry. A lot of valuable equipment lies behind us on the desert, but it can't be helped. We have cut everything to a minimum. We are due for a short, sharp race against thirst! I am sorry for Clarice Saunders.

July 4.—Three tortured days lie behind us, as well as a good many more leagues of desert. God—but we are thirsty! We still have a little water left, but we dare not use it up. Still we have found no water, even though one spur of the Kurugh Khan is quite close.

This is being written by moonlight, as we lie on the sand close to the edge of the Dead Forest of Sanaala. We have at least reached the first fringe of our goal, but we dare not enter it until tomorrow. Perhaps it's just overwrought nerves, but the forest that lies ahead of us seems evil and foreboding. Well—daylight will tell us more.

JULY 5.—The desert lies behind us at last, but this place to which we have come is even worse. Now, in the twilight, there is a desolation that depresses us all. We are well into the Dead Forest of Sanaala.

The branches of many trees are silhouetted against the sunset sky, but there are no leaves to give them body. The gaunt tracery of branches is black against the sky, like the ribs of a skeleton. This place is dead. Dead! Even the motionless, musty air seems of the grave.

Everything here has been dead for a long, long time. The trees and bushes have not lived for years—perhaps centuries. The wood is soft and crumbly with dry rot. The ground is covered by a fine brown dust that is almost the consistency of ashes. Probably it was formed by the decay of the leaves that once clothed these bare skeletons. The winds that swirl across the outer Gobi do not seem to touch this forgotten corner between the two ranges.

Our four loyal bearers sit in a huddled group, talking in low tones. On their slant-eyed Mongol faces sits a nameless fear. They stare at the shadows gathering around us as though they expect to see the ghostly retinue of the great Genghis Khan ride out from amid the dead trees. No man knows where he lies buried with the sacred yak's tail standard above his grave. Clarice, poor child, has laid aside her head scarf and is combing her hair, which has turned dry and dull. There are deep circles under her eyes.

July 6.—Another day gone, and the dead forest still surrounds us on all sides. There cannot actually be much more of it, but the place seems interminable. Our remaining water-skin is almost flat, and Clive never lets it out of his hands.

Tonight we held a conference—a bunch of unshaven scarecrows and a haggard girl. Our voices are all dry and croaking.

"We have a short water ration for tomorrow," Clive said, "and that's all. After that—God knows!"

"Tell us something new!" O'Neill snarled, his head in his hands.

Pete turned to Clive.

"Every pound we have to carry makes it harder," he said. "Why not cut our load down to a minimum."

Ed Powell nodded agreement, but Clive looked puzzled.

"We already have done that," he said. "Even our ammunition is down as low as we dare go."

"What about those heavy canvas suits you made us bring along?" Pete snapped.

With his gray hair standing on end and his skin stretched tightly over his bones he looked like a caricature.

"We don't dare abandon those," Clive said slowly.

Pete's voice rose sharply. "Why not? You never did say what they are for?"

"Don't forget that I examined the body of Tommy Reardon, who once went through here before us. There were strange scars on his body that I can't account for. I have a theory, but it's only a guess. The point is that something sinister lies ahead of us if we live to reach it. We must take that canvas armor along."

JULY 7. *Next morning.*—This will probably be the last entry ever made in this notebook. That is why I am hastily writing it now, in the pale light of dawn, while the others make up the loads and Clarice fixes the bandage on the shoulder of Chang—one of the bearers. Poor devil! This will be a bad day for him.

Disaster came to us in the night, and tragedy is close at hand. The others are silent at their work. We all know that we are entering on the last stages of one of the most horrible of deaths—death by thirst.

Sometime during the night Chang, who was on guard, suddenly shouted and we all jumped up. Dim shapes were moving about the camp. We fired a few shots, there was a litle confusion, and the intruders ran. But Chang leaned against a tree-trunk with an ugly knife wound in his shoulder.

That was bad enough, but a little later we discovered something worse. Our remaining water-skin lay flat and empty. It had been slit with a knife!

"One more move for Schweitzer," Clive said wearily. "We owe our jovial friend a lot if we ever meet up with him."

We are ready to start. It seems hopeless, for we are already nearly mad from thirst, but we may as well push on as stay here to die.

July 11.—Things looked very hopeless that morning a few days ago. With scarcely a word to each other, through lips that were dry and cracked, we picked up our packs and started.

Hour by hour we plodded forward, while the sun rose high and the still air of the Dead Forest became suffocatingly hot. The ashy dust raised by our passing was a choking cloud. Clive plodded in the lead, occasionally glancing at his compass, and the rest of us straggled after him. The wounded Chang lurched along between Lao and O'Neill, his eyes dim and emotionless.

We halted for rest every hour, stretched headlong in the dust, sprawled in whatever positions we fell on halting. Chang died half-way through the morning, so we simply left him lying there and went on.

Near sunset the end came. We had paused for one of our halts, and at last Clive stood up. He spoke to us, a mean-

ingless sound that rasped in his dry throat, but I knew it was the signal to go on. Painfully I dragged myself upright. A few yards away was Larry O'Neill, standing with his thick legs wide apart and his head hunched wearily forward. We were the only ones. The others had reached the end of their trail.

Clarice made two feeble attempts to rise and then fell back. Her father seemed to to be in a stupor, and Ed Powell was muttering incoherently to himself. Lao and the two remaining bearers had obviously not the slightest intention of moving. The thing seemed hopeless. Clive stood leaning on his rifle like some gaunt scarecrow, staring ahead with haggard eyes.

To the west the sky was reddening, glowing behind the branches of the dead trees like a fire in a grate. The trees ahead seemed to be thinning out a bit, and as I stared I saw a stone tower standing above them. Of light gray stone, touched with crimson by the setting sun, it could not have been more than a mile away. I pointed, and tried to shout, though the best I could do was a faint croaking.

It was a journey of nearly a mile out through the fringes of the Dead Forest, across some bare fields and up to the stone tower and well that stood beyond. It was unquestionably the worst mile I have ever covered. Larry and I carried Clarice, who had lost consciousness, and the others managed to stagger along. I think we were all afraid that the tower would turn out to be just a mirage.

Those last few events are dim as a nightmare. I vaguely recall that Clive broke out a canvas bucket and lowered it into the well. I know that the water tasted better than anything in my life. We doled it out slowly, a swallow at a time. Then we all rolled up in our blankets right there beside the well and went instantly to sleep.

Later in the day.—I was interrupted by Ed Powell's shout to come and eat. We have stayed here resting for a few days, but will probably push on again tomorrow. This little stone tower beside the well makes a good halting-place.

None of us has been able to figure out who dug this well and built this tower. Its ancient walls are carved with the face of some forgotten god. Pete Saunders thinks it must be the work of some offshoot of the Kmers who built Angkor-Thom, in spite of the distance from Cambodia.

It is near sunset, and I am writing this sitting on the ground with my back against the westward wall of the tower. Before me lies the unknown into which we must plunge tomorrow. The twin ranges of the Kurugh-Khan, visible like gigantic ramparts on either side, seem to merge into each other somewhere far off in the heart of the sunset. The valley between them must be triangular in shape. There is a patch of good vegetation here, and then an expanse of bare rock that drops sharply for perhaps a half-mile. Beyond lie dense woodlands.

The desolation that rules in the Dead Forest does not hold in the valley ahead. It is fertile—but there is something very strange about it. Ed Powell has just raised the same thought.

"Those woods look queer," he said, "sort of unnatural."

Clive, stretching his long legs by walking up and down beside us, nodded slowly. "They look abnormal to me, too. The green is strangely bright."

That is true. There is something disquieting and unhealthy about that lush forest below us. We can see not merely green, but other bright colors as well among the trees, and they don't look

quite right either. Remind me of the colors of toadstools.

Pete has been peering ahead through his binoculars.

"I'm no tree expert, but I'll swear there are some new kinds of trees ahead," he said. "This will be interesting."

"Hope it's not *too* interesting," Clive said grimly.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know what I mean. I'm simply remembering what happened to Tommy Reardon."

It all makes me think of what I saw last night when I looked down toward that valley just before turning in. The forest below was alive with lights. White and green, constantly in slow movement, they kept up a sort of endless dance. There was no sound on the still air, but the movement of the lights was ceaseless. Pete tried to tell us they were giant fireflies, but I doubt it.

JULY 12.—We are camped in one of the strangest places on earth. We have been through some experiences that make us begin to understand why Tommy Reardon went mad.

Soon after sunrise we gathered our things together and started west, climbing laboriously down over that long and uneven slope of rock. As we neared the edge of the jungle the queer character of the vegetation became more and more evident. We began to notice a peculiar smell. It was something like the stink of kennels on a damp day, like the smell of a hot-house, like the odor of a menagerie —yet it wasn't quite like any of them.

As we got near enough to see what the trees were like, we were even more puzzled. Their bark ranged from an unhealthy light brown to a sort of dirty pink, and on closer look the bark was somehow gruesome. It was more like the skin of an animal than the bark of a tree. It reminded me of the flesh of a corpse—bloated, and soft with an unhealthy softness. The leaves were bright and thick. But the strangest thing of all was this: all the branches of all the trees were in motion, *but there was no wind!*

Those branches seemed to move as though they were searching for something. They were lazy and sinuous, like the tentacles of a drowsy devil-fish. The trees nearest to us were in the most violent motion. Perhaps violent is not the word, for the movement was at all times easy. What I mean is that the nearest trees seemed to *grope* for us with their branches! These devil-trees had personality! We cursed under our breath, and carefully picked our path so that we avoided contact with them. Clarice had gone very pale.

Little by little we came to realize that these *things*—I cannot really call them trees—were conscious of our presence. They did not seem to have any eyes, but they somehow perceived that we were there. It was horrible!

Ed Powell was the first to speak.

"Do you see them too?" he asked.

"We see them, all right," Larry O'Neill muttered. "I've heard of the Devil's garden, but I never thought to be in it this way."

"This is interesting as all hell," Pete said. "In this isolated valley evolution has followed a course only hinted at in the outside world. The animal and vegetable kingdoms have been crossed. These things are as much one as the other. Notice that a few of the branches are shaped like antennæ with round knobs on the end? They are probably phosphorescent, the lights we saw last night."

"Do you mean those hellish creatures can see?" O'Neill asked.

"I think so, in some way. Look there!"

As he spoke, a flock of birds came by, probably flying over from one of the

mountain ranges. They were low, just above the tops of the trees. As we watched, a branch suddenly shot up in the air and caught an unwary bird that had been a little lower than the rest of the flock. One of the big leaves closed like a fist around the bird, which fluttered helplessly. The branch curved down and thrust its prey into an opening that suddenly appeared near the top of the trunk. The jaws, if you can call them that, closed again with a snap.

Clarice Saunders gasped. "Horrible!" she said.

Clive dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground.

"I've heard of giant fly-trap plants," he said, "but these are far worse. Well—we might as well go on. But first we'll all put on these heavy canvas suits that we've carried with us. I had a hunch of something of this sort after I saw the scars on his body and listened to his ravings. Poor devil, he must have had a tough time getting through here!"

We put on the canvas suits, looking something like aviators. We slung our rifles, which probably wouldn't be much good against creatures with the disseminated nervous systems the tree-animals must have, and instead we drew the heavy machetes we had brought along to cut brush. God knows we never expected to have to use them as weapons against such weird opponents!

Then we started forward in a compact group. Clive went first, then Pete and I with Clarice between us, while Lao and the two remaining bearers brought up the rear. Powell and O'Neill acted as flankers. As the tree-animals were only about twelve or fourteen feet tall, there was plenty of sunlight. Now and then we passed scattered clumps of ordinary trees, mostly conifers. They looked very friendly and normal and home-like!

Though the underbrush was pretty dense, the tree-animals were far enough apart so that it was not too hard to keep out of their reach. We drove steadily forward. The branches of the *things* broke into violent motion as we passed, and the central trunks with their blotchy skin swayed toward us. There were plenty of traces of small game, and we forded several streams.

The tragedy came swiftly. We were passing through a clump of strange red fungi when Ed Powell tripped over a creeper and fell. His face landed squarely on one of the big red fungi that looked something like giant toadstools, and the thing seemed to explode. The next instant Ed had commenced to scream horribly and was rolling over and over on the ground. Even as I jumped to help him, he rolled within reach of one of the tree-animals, and a pair of branches reached down to seize him by the legs.

With a swing of my machete I slashed off one of the branches. The stump curled back as though in pain, and a viscous yellow liquid gushed out like blood. Another branch grabbed at me, the spines on its flat leaves catching in my canvas armor. I slashed out furiously with shortened blade, at the same time seizing Powell around the waist. Then the others arrived, and we dragged him clear. It took two of us to get his hands down from his face.

The poor devil's eyes are entirely gone, eaten away! Evidently the fungus on which he fell contained some very powerful acid. His whole face is terribly burned as well. Clive did what he could to ease the pain, and gave him a stiff injection of morphine from our medicine kit, but it was horrible. The rest of the day Ed staggered along between Pete and me, partly supported by us.

We are now camped for the night in the center of a small grove of conifers. It

is pleasant to smell their faint fragrance, and to touch the rough and friendly bark! It helps our sanity in this mad place. As the embers of our small fire fade out, the evil lights on the tree-animals all around us seem to grow brighter. Attached to each of the things is a pair of gleaming globes that move slowly, like giant fireflies. There is something terrifying about being thus surrounded by thousands of strange creatures, knowing that they are watching us through the darkness with their sleepless eyes and always waiting for us to come within their reach.

July 13. Morning.—Ed Powell is gone. He vanished in the night. We do not know what happened. We can only guess.

Lao was on guard at the time Powell disappeared, and he swears that he heard nothing and saw nothing. Most likely he had dozed off for a while. We do not know whether Ed wandered away, driven crazy by the pain of his wounds, or whether something took him. Perhaps, back of his disappearance, there may lie some nameless horror yet unguessed. We can only go on.

Evening.— Another night surrounded by the tree-animals. We must be getting near the head of the valley now, but there is no trace of the diamonds. The normal life of the past has taken on all the unreality of a dream. So long ago! It is hard to believe that there ever was any other life than this of peril and danger and endless pushing on.

We passed the body of a man today, or rather part of what had once been a man. The gruesome thing lay at the foot of a tree-animal which had probably eaten the rest.

"Probably one of Schweitzer's men," Clive muttered. "The thing must have caught him and torn him in half."

JULY 14. *Morning.*—There are only seven of us left now, for one of our bearers was taken during the night. Probably the same thing happened to Powell the night before. But even though we saw this man go, we are still unable to explain it.

I was on guard. The fire had died from lack of fuel, for there is little real wood in this ghastly place, but there was a fair amount of moonlight. The phosphor-lights of the tree-animals were, of course, all around us. Suddenly I experienced an unpleasant sensation of being watched. I stood up and looked around, but there was nothing in sight. I started to take a slow walk around the borders of the camp.

It was just as I was completing the circuit that I saw the *thing*. It had lingered for an instant in a belt of moonlight. Gross, misshapen, a mass of tentacles surrounding a stumpy body, it was like a shadow from a madman's dream. Unreal and horrible. For a moment I stared, then shouted an alarm. At the same moment I flung up my rifle and fired.

I must have hit the thing, for it gave a sudden yelp. Then, moving with incredible speed, the monster bounded across the camp and seized the nearest sleeper, who happened to be one of the bearers. It vanished in the shadows. We could hear Fan-Kee's screams dying away in the distance, and then they ended with a gruesome abruptness.

There was no more sleep for the rest of the night. A brief attempt to follow the trail of the thing that had taken Fan-Kee was hopeless. We threw what wood was left on the fire, and gathered close around it.

"What do you suppose it was?" O'Neill asked with awe in his voice.

"God knows," Clive answered wearily. "Ask Jim. He's the only one who saw it clearly."

"Well," I told them at last, "the nearest I can say is that it looked like a cross between an octopus and a cactus plant pulled up by the roots—if you get what I mean."

"Probably the final stage in this strange laboratory of perverted evolution," Pete said slowly. "These other things around us are still more plant than animal, but this new thing is evidently more on the animal side—particularly since it cried out when you shot it. It should be interesting to examine one closely."

"I only hope I never come within a mile of one again," I told him sullenly.

JULY 15.—We should sleep tonight. We are camped on a sandy point running out into a broad lake. The neck of land connecting us with the shore is very narrow, and one man can easily guard it against even such foes as we have here. We now know what our enemies look like. In fact, there are two of them drinking from the lake not two hundred yards away at this moment.

They stand perhaps five feet tall, with a round misshapen body and a dozen legs that are tentacles as well. They look something like octopi, or giant spiders. Dark brown hair covers body and tentacles, but it is not a real animal hair so much as fuzz, such as you find on a root freshly pulled from the ground. They have a head equipped with a sort of beak, and a pair of round cold eyes, and a cluster of leaves on top. When crouching down with tentacles folded they look like a pile of rocks and earth covered with vines or creepers. Yet they are capable of great speed.

Behind us the lake—we have christened it Lake Reardon in memory of the poor devil who was here before us—stretches smooth and cool to the base of the sheer ranges that close the valley. The rock seems to rise straight from the water at all points. Those silent peaks still hold the secret of how Tommy Reardon managed to cross them when alone and injured. We have seen no sign of Schweitzer.

Through the glasses we can see an outcropping of broken rock half a mile along the shore of the lake. It looks like a promising spot for our diamonds.

July 19.—We have been having another quiet interlude. We have built a barricade of rocks across the narrow neck that connects us with shore, but so far it hasn't been necessary. Some of the tentacle creatures often browse near by, but they do not bother us. Most of the trees along the shore are ordinary pines and cedars, perhaps because the sandy soil is unfavorable to the tree-animals.

These tentacle-creatures seem to be just half-way between the plant and the animal. Though carnivorous and free-moving, they will stand for hours with their tentacles thrust deep in the moist ground. The head and eyes are animal, the coating of leaves is entirely vegetable. If I have any nightmares for the next twenty years, those damn things will be in them!

JULY 21.—Well—we're all rich men. And we're likely to die here without a chance to enjoy our fortunes. I suppose it's funny—but I don't feel like laughing.

Among the broken rock of an outcropping on the beach we found volcanic pipes filled with blue clay. In them were plenty of uncut diamonds. It must be the place where Tommy Reardon found his stones, for the initials T. R. were scratched on a smooth slab of rock. We have plenty of diamonds for all of us, but the trouble is to find our way back to civilization.

I have a feeling we could never get back the way we came. The now aroused tentacle-creatures would make our passage back through the jungle far more difficult.

Every day they come in increasing numbers to watch us. They seem very curious. They particularly gather at twilight, squatting along the edge of the jungle and watching us with their cold eyes.

The things seem to be simply curious —not hostile—but we remember the fate of Ed Powell and Fan-Kee. Our policy is one of watchful waiting, for we fear they are not highly vulnerable. We dare not provoke an attack by trying to kill them, yet our passive attitude seems to increase their confidence. They come nearer every day, and we are getting nervous.

No one else has expressed the opinions I have written above, but I think they all share them. They all agreed very promptly to my proposal to build a raft to examine at close range the cliffs surrounding the lake. Shadows are gathering—and we may as well try what we can.

JULY 22.—There came an interruption just as I was writing the above last night. A tall man, who looked like some wild prophet with his black beard and fanatical eyes, stalked out of the woods and walked toward our peninsula. It was Schweitzer. Behind him were half a dozen Chinese with rifles slung on their backs.

We dropped down behind the barricade and leveled our rifles. Schweitzer halted and held up his hand.

"I come in peace," he boomed. "Let us have a friendly talk."

"Come up to the barricade alone," Clive told him, "but tell your men to stay where they are and keep their rifles slung."

Schweitzer leaned on his rifle and grinned at us wolfishly across our low barricade of rock. He was thin and worn, and through his torn clothes we could see ugly red scars on his body. If the six men with him were all he had left, his party must have suffered even worse than ours in the jungle. Probably it was the canvas armor that saved us, for time and again we had been touched by a long branch of one of the tree-animals as we tried to thread our way among them.

Schweitzer was as arrogant and overbearing as ever. The pride of Lucifer burns in that man, and I think he would try to dictate to the Devil at the gates of hell. Clive stood up to talk to him.

"I come as your friend," Schweitzer announced in his deep voice.

Clive's smile was wintry. "We've seen a lot of that in the past," he said.

Schweitzer gestured impatiently. "That was nothing. Mere measures of war. Now the time has come when it is in both our interests to work together. I have found some fossils of great scientific value. You have found — I noticed through the glasses — some diamonds. Either party is probably too weak to win out of this place alone, but we might do it together. What do you say?"

I wondered what Clive would answer. For myself, I was remembering how Schweitzer's men had destroyed our water supply in the midst of the Dead Forest. Beside me, Larry O'Neill was muttering obscene insults under his breath. Then Clive smiled thinly.

"I'll give you one minute to get off this peninsula and take your men back in the woods. Then we open fire."

Schweitzer's face became dark with rage, but he picked up his rifle and turned away.

"You are a pack of swine!" he shouted over his shoulder. "We have more food and can wait. Stay here till you starve."

With his men at his heels, he strode off into the woods and disappeared. We all relaxed, and Larry muttered gloomily:

"I should have shot that baboon as he walked away."

"Might not have been a bad idea," Clive said grimly, rubbing the unshaven

stubble on his chin. "We must raise the barricade higher and keep behind it. When our friend gets a little desperate he may try to pot us from the shelter of the woods. And we must rush building the raft — it's our only chance now that Schweitzer blocks escape through the woods."

"We have quite a number of trees cut already," I pointed out.

"Exactly. We'll work all night till we get enough."

We have raised the barricade higher, and are waiting until after sunset to work on the raft. It seems wiser to wait till darkness will screen us from Schweitzer.

JULY 23.—Things are happening fast, and our sands seem to be running low. It is probably foolish to bother to write this journal any further, but there is a lull at the moment and it is a good way to kill time.

At sunset last night we went to work on the raft. Clarice and Lao stood guard with rifles, while the rest of us felled half a dozen of the medium-sized evergreens nearest the shoreline and began to strip them of branches. Though we could see the phosphor-lights of the tree-animals dancing their bacchanale a little way back in the jungle, we were working in almost complete darkness. We did not dare risk a light. It would have made too good a target if Schweitzer were near.

When the logs were trimmed, we dragged them out into the lake to be pulled to the end of the peninsula. We were standing waist-deep in cold water. Then we came back ashore and cut some saplings to make into rough oars. Clarice and Lao stood together, talking in low tones and leaning on their rifles.

Suddenly dark figures materialized around us. They had slipped up unseen from the forest. Lao flung up his rifle and fired. One of the converging shadows faltered in midstride and went sprawling on the sand, but venomous tongues of yellow flame stabbed out as the others fired. Lao's rifle dropped from his hands, and the big Manchu sagged. A moment later he had fallen forward on his face.

We were completely taken by surprize, and the thing was over in an instant. Schweitzer had disarmed Clarice, and the rest of us had laid aside our weapons when we waded into the water. Now we were helpless under the guns of the others.

"I offered you peace, my hot-headed friends," Schweitzer rumbled with a sort of heavy geniality, "but you chose war. So be it! Now we will take your diamonds, and your canvas suits which we have seen. But first we will secure you against foolishness."

He took a short length of cord and stepped up to Clarice, who was nearest.

"Please cross your wrists behind you, *Fräulein,*" he said with ironic politeness.

For an instant Clarice glared at him, standing very straight with her chin in the air. Then she shrugged, and clasped her hands behind her back. Schweitzer tied the girl's wrists securely, and motioned to one of his men to take her in charge.

When Schweitzer and his men rushed us I had been a little farther back toward our own peninsula than the others. While he talked, and while he was binding Clarice's hands, I had slowly been inching backward. Slow motion is difficult to detect in the darkness. Just as Schweitzer finished with Clarice's hands I decided it was time to make a break for it.

Spinning around, I sprinted at top speed up the peninsula toward our camp —and our rifles—a hundred yards away. Shouts sounded behind me, and an irregular volley cracked out. Bullets smacked on the sand ahead, but I was un-

touched when I tumbled headlong over the barricade.

A moment later I had cocked one rifle, seized two others, and started back toward shore. There seemed to be a lot of turmoil on the beach, and when I got there I found the disheveled survivors of our party in possession of the field. When I broke away and drew the fire of the German's men, Clive and the others had jumped them. Schweitzer had almost immediately called off his men—but they had taken Clarice Saunders with them!

Behind the shelter of our rock wall, we lit a lantern and gathered for a hasty council. To leave the camp and supplies unprotected while we went to look for Clarice might be fatal. And it would probably be playing right into Schweitzer's hands, since he must expect us to try a rescue. Surprize was our only chance, and two would probably do as well as four. Larry and I were to go.

"All right," I said tensely, "shall we start now?"

"Wait until moonrise," Clive told us, "then you'll have a better idea of what you're doing. Pete and I will make some noise here and keep the lantern lit."

Larry and I buttoned our holsters tightly, and secured our knives by lanyards around our necks. We smeared our bodies heavily with grease to give some protection against the bitter cold of the water. At last the moon rose over the jagged peaks of the Kurugh Khan and shed a pale radiance on the smooth water of Lake Reardon. Larry and I shook hands with the others, then slipped over the barricade.

We crawled up the peninsula on hands and knees to avoid being silhouetted against the sky. On reaching the pile of logs we dragged one out into the water, then waded till we were up to our armpits.

"God, but it's cold!" I muttered.

"It is that," Larry whispered back. "What wouldn't I give right now for a good drink of whisky! Irish whisky! Well, come on."

SLOWLY we waded westward, pushing the log before us and keeping our bodies under water. There was a low mist on the face of the lake, which increased our chances of being taken for simply a drifting log if we were seen at all. Watching the shore as we went by, we pushed steadily ahead.

Once we saw a dark blot against the silver of the beach, probably one of Schweitzer's sentries watching to see if we came along the shoreline. My teeth were beginning to chatter, and I clenched my jaws savagely. At last we saw a pin-point of fire gleaming through the trees.

Where that fire was burning must be Schweitzer and Clarice. We went ahead until we were directly in line with the fire, and then moved slowly inshore. We would have to take our chances on meeting any of the tentacle-creatures on our progress from the beach to Schweitzer's clearing.

Our slow journey along the shore had taken longer than we realized, and the moon was setting when at last we crouched in the shadows at the edge of Schweitzer's camp. A small fire burned in the clearing, and four of Schweitzer's bearers were dozing around it. The German scientist himself sat on a log with his chin in his hand and his strange eyes fixed on the fire. He seemed to be brooding.

Clarice was near by, sitting on the ground with her back against a small sapling. Her wrists were tightly tied behind the slender trunk, and her crossed ankles were lashed together. She looked very tired. For a few seconds I whispered in Larry's ear, and then we separated.

I crawled as close to Clarice as I could

get without leaving the shadows, and then settled down to wait. Larry had farther to go, and it would take him some time.

At last a shot rang out across the clearing. Schweitzer leaped to his feet, and at the same moment Larry's mighty voice boomed through the darkness. "All right now, boys, *all together!*"

I saw Schweitzer leap into action, snatching up his rifle and plunging out of the firelight into the shadows across the clearing. In the moment when he stood there I had the sights of my rifle lined up on the back of his head, but I could not pull the trigger. It seemed too much like cold-blooded murder.

There was a great deal of noise from across the clearing. Scattered shots came in quick succession, and Larry's voice shouting mingled commands and encouragement. The German's bearers had all followed him, and our ruse was working. Larry was doing his best to sound like half a dozen men. I jumped into the clearing and cut Clarice's bonds.

"Back along the shore!" I whispered to her. "Come on!"

We broke through the underbrush till we reached the shore, and then ran at top speed down the beach. I had thought Schweitzer would be too busy with Larry to notice what was happening on our side of the clearing, but we had not gone over a hundred yards when we heard shouted orders behind us and then the crash of men charging through the underbrush.

The damp sand dragged at our feet and we could not make very good time. Dawn was near, and there was a faint gray light along the eastern sky. The men behind us were gaining fast, one well ahead of the rest.

"Keep going!" I snapped to Clarice and spun around with my rifle raised. Then I saw that the nearest pursuer was Larry.

"Get along with you!" he panted, and flung himself down on the sand.

Larry's rifle spat viciously back at the shadows behind, and after a moment's hesitation I ran on after Clarice. With Larry to cover the retreat, it was foolish to let the girl go on toward our camp alone. A minute later I saw her running back toward me.

"Jim," she gasped, "one of those *things* is after me and I have no gun."

Close on her heels was one of the fantastic tentacle-creatures, bizarre and terrifying in the pale light of breaking day. As I shot twice at its cold eyes it leaped toward us with a shrill scream. I flung Clarice to one side and jumped myself, snapping a shot behind the creature's head as it hurtled by me. It fell to the ground, writhing and screaming, but was up again before we had taken a dozen strides.

This time I met the thing squarely, jamming the muzzle of my rifle into its open beak and pulling the trigger. Again the monster went down, screaming horribly, and this time it did not rise to follow as we ran off.

There was now a pale gray light that struck coldly through the mists. Our little peninsula came in sight as we ran, and Clive and Pete came running down to meet us.

"Good work!" Clive snapped. "Where is Larry?"

I nodded back toward the strip of mist-veiled beach behind. "Back there somewhere. Let's go get him."

Clive and I trotted steadily along over the loose sand of the beach. Somewhere ahead of us Larry was still alive, for we could hear a scattering and desultory rifle fire. The beach was a narrow corridor between the blackness of the forest and the mists of the lake. Then with startling suddenness, a man loomed up through the fog ahead of us.

It was Larry. There was no mistaking that hulking form, even though he now staggered with unsteady steps. As we ran forward he fell to his knees. His chest was horrible to see, riddled with bullets, and a crimson trail stretched back across the sand the way he had come. With indomitable will he twisted around and emptied his rifle into the mist. Then, just as we reached his side, he fell again.

There was nothing we could do. A man with a less remarkable vitality would have been dead long before. In the grip of delirium he muttered brokenly that Morales was storming San Jacinto. God only knows in what forgotten fight he thought he was at the moment. Then he died.

CLIVE and I carried Larry's broken body back to camp. He was a heavy load, but we would not leave him there on the beach for the tentacle-creatures to feed on. Sunlight was gilding the peaks of the Kurugh Khan as we buried him under a big pile of boulders by a friendly pine tree on the edge of the jungle. Then we started to complete our raft.

We were not destined to do any work on the raft. Probably it never will be completed. Even as we got our axes from the stores behind the barricade, Clarice pointed shoreward.

"Look there!" she gasped.

A half-dozen of the tentacle-creatures had emerged from the jungle and were slowly crossing the beach. Gruesome and ominous, they settled down in a semicircle at the base of our peninsula about a hundred yards away. Even at that distance we could feel the relentless glare of their cold and unblinking eyes. Three more came out of the jungle.

"Looks as if they mean trouble," Clive said.

Pete nodded. "They seem to be gathering for an attack in force."

"Then we're done for," I told them hastily. "I fought one on the beach last night. I finished him off finally, but they're very hard to kill. If a lot of them rush us at once we haven't a chance."

While we stod there silently, clutching our almost useless rifles, the gathering of our foes steadily grew in size. By twos and threes, a minute or so apart, more tentacle-creatures moved out of the jungle and squatted down on the sand. There were a full score of them when Pete suddenly swore with deep feeling and began to hurl the contents of the packs out on the sand with frantic haste.

"I've an idea!" he snapped. "Where's that box with the gold assay equipment?"

"In the third pack," Clive answered wearily. He glanced at me, and we were both wondering if Pete Saunders' mind had weakened under the strain. "What good will that do us?"

"There's a lot of potassium cyanide in there. Here! You take this file and cut deep notches in the noses of our rifle bullets. Work fast!"

We caught the idea then, and furiously began to file deep notches in our nickel-jacketed bullets. Pete had found the cyanide and added a little water. As we finished each bullet he stuffed the notch with the deadly chemical and smeared it all over the nose. As each was finished he laid it carefully on a piece of canvas.

"It's just a chance," he said hastily. "The nervous system of these creatures must be very abnormal, but there's a bare possibility that cyanide may do the trick. It's our only hope."

As I write this, with all our bullets ready and nothing to do but hope, the attack is imminent. There must be over fifty of the things on shore there now. They have now arisen to stand on their tentacles, obviously getting ready for a rush. Clive is carefully sighting his rifle,

about to try the effect of one of our prepared bullets. . . .

Clive's shot went home, but the creature seems unaffected. God help us now!

JULY 24.—We are now floating on a crude raft on the surface of Lake Reardon, we few who still remain alive. It now seems more hopeless than ever to continue writing, but at least it keeps my mind busy. I certainly never expected any of us to survive that mad turmoil at the barricade.

As if Clive's shot had been a signal, the assault began. The tentacle-creatures began to straggle up the narrow peninsula. The soft sand slowed them up, and they could not move as fast as we had seen them do in the jungle. It was a grim sight to see that horde of perverted creatures waddling silently toward them. I moved over next to Clarice Saunders and quietly decided to put a bullet in her brain the moment the fight was definitely lost.

At once we opened fire, shooting as fast as we could work the levers of our rifles and refill our magazines. A chorus of shrill yelps came from the advancing horde as our bullets struck home. I hit one squarely in the eye and saw it go sprawling among its fellows with tentacles twitching horribly. Another went down, and then another, but the main advance continued almost unchecked. They were half-way to the barricade, and the barrels of our rifles were hot to the touch. Those in the front rank, hit by many bullets, were wavering but still advancing. I made sure that my machete was close at hand, and then shifted my fire to the ranks farther back.

Up to the rampart came the tentacled mob, into the very muzzles of our guns. As we were bracing for the final rush that would send them pouring over the rocky barrier, the two things in the lead stopped short. They began to scream horribly. Not the short yelps that had followed each bullet wound, but a long-drawn keening that chilled the blood. Foam dripped from their jaws. All at once they dropped writhing on the sand, and another just moving past them began to exhibit the same symptoms.

"By Heaven, the poison's working at last!" Pete shouted jubilantly. "Those were hit first and oftenest. Let the others have it!"

That was the secret of our salvation. The poison had been slow to work upon the curious nervous organization of the creatures, but it had taken effect at last. As we poured in a new fire, the same thing began to happen throughout the mass of our attackers. The turmoil was deafening, and the length of the peninsula was a hell of twisting, agonized tentacles. Only one of the things actually mounted the barricade—and was cut to pieces by our flailing machetes.

The survivors slowly withdrew. Perhaps a dozen staggered back across the beach. We shouted and laughed hysterically, but then we took stock of our remaining supplies.

Only twenty or thirty rifle cartridges remained among all of us, and we could never survive another attack in force. We hurried to complete our raft, and in about three hours we had finished. The slain tentacle-creatures had grown still at last, looking like a long pile of jagged stumps. There was no sign of another advance from shore yet, but we wasted no time. As soon as we could load all our gear on the raft we pushed off and floated clear on the waters of the lake.

We turned toward the eastern and nearer spur of the range. Our crude oars were not very effective, but we made definite progress. We were pretty well shaken. Clive took a small bottle of brandy from what remained of our medi-

cal stores, and each of us took a drink.

It was just at that moment that there came a sudden outburst of screams and shots from on shore. We could see nothing beyond the edge of the jungle, but the sounds that came across the water indicated that hell had broken loose somewhere beyond the fringe of trees.

One of Schweitzer's men burst out through the underbrush. He backed slowly down across the beach, and every other step he paused to fire at something we could not yet see. Other men appeared, Schweitzer among them. All were fleeing from something that was pressing them back from the jungle.

Then the first of the tentacle-creatures came into sight. It ran toward the nearest of the fleeing men, crouching forward and shaking its ghastly head from side to side. Hit squarely, it faltered for a moment but then started forward again. The man suddenly found his rifle empty. With a despairing cry he hurled the weapon at his pursuer and ran toward the water. The thing caught him in the shallows. Clarice averted her head from the grisly sight, but the rest of us stared in a sort of horrible fascination.

Another wave of the tentacle-creatures swept out of the jungle, and Schweitzer abandoned the fight entirely. Hurling away his rifle, he dove into the water and began to swim out toward our raft. Most of the creatures stopped at the water's edge, but two of them plunged in after the fleeing man. With their tentacles splashing steadily, they caught him in a dozen strokes. For a few seconds there was a wild confusion while they pulled him under; then the water grew crimson and the turmoil died.

Clive laid aside the rifle he had lifted. "Exit Schweitzer," he said without flippancy.

It is now the next day, and we have been a third of the way around the lake. The cliffs are as sheer and unscalable as ever. Only the knowledge that Tommy Reardon escaped in some way from this place keeps us going.

AUGUST 16.—It is very pleasant here in the hospital at Changor. After all we have been through, it is good to lie still and do nothing at all. My broken leg is healing nicely.

In the late afternoon of the next day after the last entry above, we were paddling listlessly along the far border of the lake where the cliffs were screened by a great mass of vines. For a while we ceased paddling and just let the raft drift. It was a few minutes later that I noticed we were drifting steadily along parallel to the rock wall.

With every passing minute our speed increased, and soon we were speeding along in the grip of a current that gurgled softly against the rock as it went by. We became frightened then, and tried to paddle out of the current.

Our crude paddles had little effect, and we could not get free from the current. Every minute we traveled more swiftly. The raft swung against the rock with a heavy jolt, and scraped along against the cliffs. Then we were spun around, and many trailing vines brushed our faces. A second later we were speeding along in a faint gray light that quickly turned to utter blackness. The roar of the waters was loud in our ears.

"I see it now," Clive shouted. "We should have realized that the lake must have an outlet somewhere, with all those streams running into it. Try to find that lantern, Jim."

A few minutes later I had located the lantern and managed to light it. We were floating on the surface of an underground river that flowed through a natural arched cavern. The waters hissed and gurgled as they flowed, and the raft sped

along at high speed. Though the tunnel varied in width from time to time, we found that one man with a steering-oar could keep the raft in the middle of the channel.

"This must be the way Tommy Reardon escaped," Clive said, "probably on a raft like this. Very likely this thing has its outlet across the mountains. We must be making ten miles an hour."

"But what made Tommy go blind? It must have happened near the end of his journey."

"God knows."

For perhaps an hour more we drifted quickly along. Then Clarice, who was siting beside me, looked up sharply.

"What's that?"

I followed her pointing finger, and saw a black shape that circled above us. Occasionally it dipped down toward the light, then soared up again to the roof of the cavern, which at this point was quite high.

"Some sort of a bat," I said.

"Queer-looking bat!" Pete Saunders was peering up at it. "Not like any I ever saw before."

Even as he spoke, the thing swooped down toward him. With its leathery black wings flapping, it darted straight for his face. He flung up his arms for protection, and I struck at the giant bat with the butt of my rifle. The next instant it had flown away, but Pete had an ugly wound in his forearm.

"This thing hurts!" he muttered, his voice rising sharply. "It burns. It burns like fire!"

Clive had already ripped open the medicine chest and was working speedily. The flesh around Pete's wound was turning yellow. Then Clive poured on a strong alkaline solution. It smoked as it met the acid eating into the wound. Pete went white as a sheet, and set his teeth in his lower lip till a trickle of blood ran down his chin. After a while he relaxed.

"Thanks, Clive," he said. "I feel better now. That thing injected some kind of acid, all right. The funny thing is that it went straight for my eyes. A second slower with my hands and I would have been blinded."

"Now we know what happened to Tommy Reardon. Poor devil, it was a tough break to have it happen after getting this far. We'd better put our canvas armor on again."

WE LOST count of time. The hours did not seem to exist in that dark, roaring cavern beneath the mountains. For mile after mile we were carried along on the face of the underground river. The swift current kept the air moving, and we had no trouble in breathing. Now and then one of the strange bats swooped down to attack us, but they were not so hard to beat off when we were on the watch for them. Clarice slept fitfully, and the fever from his wound seemed to have made Pete drowsy, but the rest of us were able to keep the bats away from them.

Later, a long time later, a tiny spot of light appeared ahead. I was squatting on the raft at the time, with the lantern behind me. For a minute I blinked, thinking it might be a trick of my eyes, but then I was sure.

"Light ahead!" I shouted.

Clive crawled up beside me.

"Right! It must be the end of the tunnel. We have gone far enough to be on the other side of the Kurugh Khan. Wake Clarice up—and get off this heavy canvas. You can't tell what we may find at the end."

Gradually the spot of light grew larger. Before long we could see the rocky opening at the end. As the daylight filtered into the tunnel we had the

illusion of standing stationary on the river while the tunnel rushed past us. Blue sky appeared ahead, there came a sudden roaring—and we were out in the blinding sunlight.

Everything fell away from us. Dimly I realized that the raft had gone over a fall. The logs broke apart as they hit the water below, and a searing pain went through my right leg as the bone snapped between two of the churning timbers. With one arm around Clarice and the other clinging to one of the logs I fought to keep our heads above water. When friendly hands pulled us to shore a little later I tried to speak, and in the same moment lost consciousness.

There isn't much more to tell. We lost all our photos and specimens and scientific data. Most of the diamonds went too, but enough stayed in Clive's pockets to make us all reasonably well off. Clive and Pete are talking about going back some other time to try and capture a tentacle-creature alive in the interests of science, but Clarice and I will probably try a little domestic science instead.

Cordelia's Song

By VINCENT STARRETT

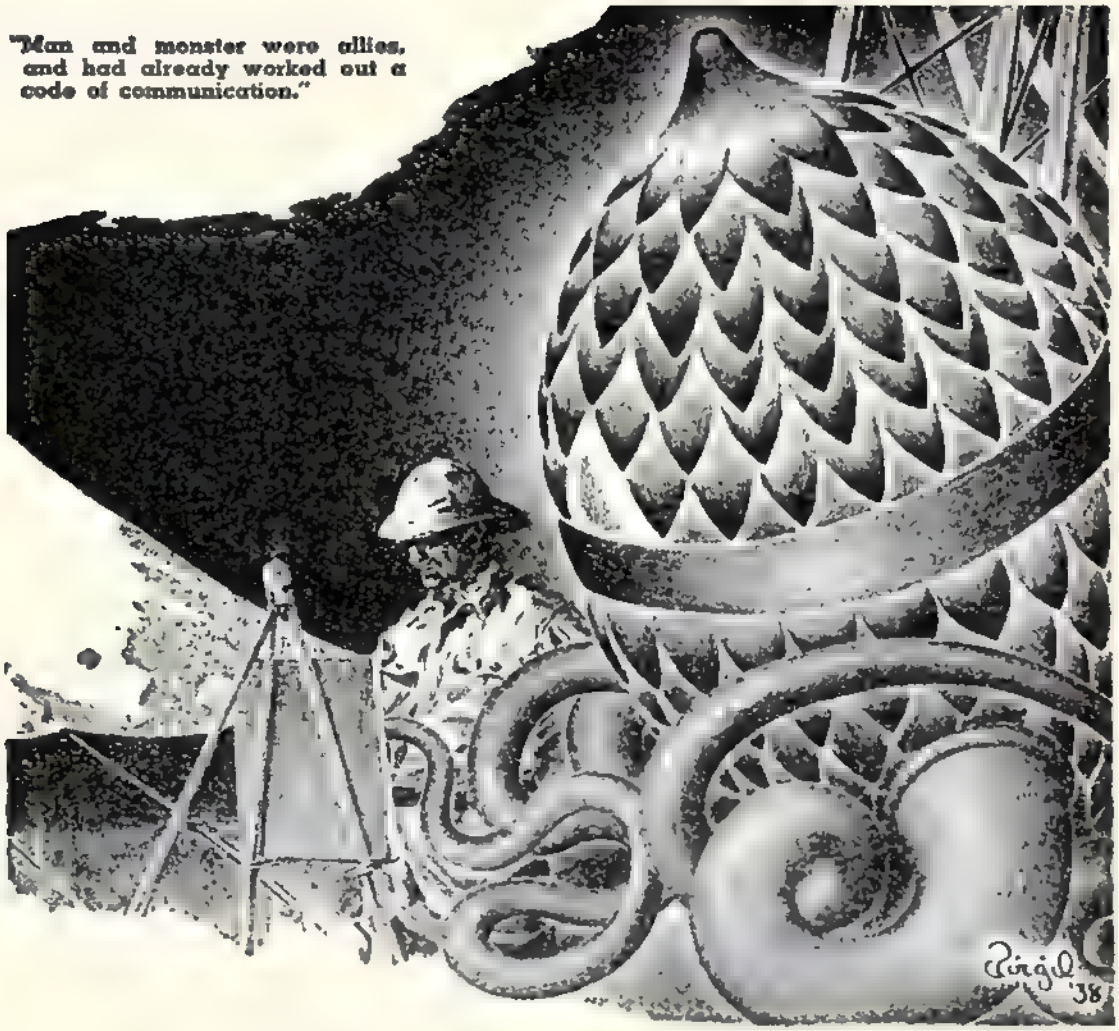
(From "The King in Yellow")

The moon shines whitely; I shall take
My silk umbrella, lest the moon
Too warmly fall upon the lake
And cause my bridal flowers to swoon.

The sparrow's sorrow is in vain,
And so does he his bride forget.
I wed the long grass and the rain,
And seven sailors dripping wet.

And shall not you and shall not I
Keep tryst beside this silent stream,
Who thought that we should rather die
Than wed the peacock's amber dream?

The moon shines whitely; I shall take
My silk umbrella, lest the moon
Too coldly fall upon the lake
And chill my bridal flowers too soon.



"Man and monster were allies, and had already worked out a code of communication."

Dreadful Sleep

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A thrilling tale, a romantic and tragic tale, a weird-scientific story of the awakening of the fearsome beings that lay in dreadful slumber under the antarctic ice, and the strange doom that befell the world

The Story Thus Far

CAPTAIN RON DUNBAR, the polar explorer who tells the story, at first refused to pilot Doctor Aston Harding's expedition to Antarctica in 1960—the dreadful year of the Time Fault. He was alarmed by the change in Harding, who once had been a friend. Now the man seemed strangely altered, almost *possessed!*

This story began in WEIRD TALES for March

In the end, however, Ron agreed to go —for the sake of Meriden Bell.

It is Bell's atomic battery with which they hope to thaw the ice cap. Another discovery of his, a deadly bacteriophage, stolen by his hunchbacked assistant, Mawson Kroll, and sold to the Asiatics, had killed a million Americans in the last war. Bell was exonerated, Kroll convicted and executed. But, still burdened with guilt, Bell wishes to make atonement—by giving humanity a new continent.

Maru-Mora came to Ron that night, and warned him not to go. A being of alien beauty, she had the bust of an elfin queen, golden-furred and strangely crowned, cupped in a flying opalescent shell. She drew Ron out of his body, in what seemed a dream, and carried him to the pylon of purple crystal in which she dwells, on a nameless polar mountain.

There she pointed out the Sleepers—monstrous invaders from beyond the earth, frozen under the ice. If the ice is thawed, she warns, they will wake, resume their long-arrested conquest of the planet.

Translator of the warning was Karalee, strange lovely girl who lives in a rock-hewn apartment beside Maru-Mora's pylon. She and Ron loved at once, even in that dream. But she forbade him, tearfully, ever to seek her.

When he woke, however, Ron's common sense rejected the warning of the dream. At the very beginning of the antarctic night, he flew the little party to the camp beyond the pole: Harding and his loyal wife Jerry, Bell, and a young engineer named Veering.

Slowly the atomic equipment was assembled. Harding's strangely altered nature, to Jerry's distress, became more ill. He spent his time studying the queer crystal fossils that Veering had found under the ice.

Ron had sensed an intangible presence haunting the camp. It was in April when he woke and saw Bell staggering away across the ice, lured by the shining specter of an elfin woman flying in a shell.

He knew, then, that Maru-Mora was real, her warning true.

She had called Bell away to stop the thawing of the ice!

The story continues:

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7. *For Love of Maru-Mora*

ONE thing was clear. Bewildered dread still fogged my mind. But I knew that Merry Bell had wandered out alone across the ice—knew that, without aid, he soon would die of cold. I told the others that I was going after him.

Aston Harding looked at me oddly. The dark glasses that he had worn since he began research on Veering's crystal fossils gave his long ruddy face a curiously sinister look.

"Yes, go after him, Dunbar," he rasped unpleasantly. "He's got to finish his job here. Then he can go where he likes."

Jerry Harding winced from the tone of that.

"You must find him, Ron," she begged compassionately. "Poor Merry—he has had no experience on the ice. He'll suffer. He has seemed so anxious lately—somehow tortured."

Whether it would take an hour or a week to find Bell, I didn't know. Still following that eldritch siren, he had vanished beneath the fading aurora. I could only follow in the same direction. Hastily I put on trail clothing, while Jerry packed a little food for me, and a tiny alcohol burner. In ten minutes I set out, the light pack slung on my shoulders, carrying a flashlight and a compact little Hamlin gyro-compass. A grim impulse turned me back at the doorway, to pick up my automatic pistol.

Striking out northward, along the ridge, I was pondering the riddle of Maru-Mora, the dark enigma of the Tharshoon, the haunting question of Karalee's reality. Soon, however, the difficulties of the trail were enough to claim all my attention.

The going was not at all good. The ice was cracked and fissured, heaved into jutting masses. Over all was sifted the white drift snow that might here be half an inch deep, there hide a hundred-foot crevasse.

I was able, for the first half-mile, to follow the trail of Bell's boots. The dying witch-fires of the aurora still gave a little aid. The thin beam of the electric torch cut a small disk of flickering silver from the gray, ghostly starlight.

The trail ended, however, at the edge of a long steep slope of clear, wind-swept ice. Beyond, some stray gust may have covered it with snow. I couldn't find it again.

I pushed on northward, at last, following only the compass. The Mountains of Uranus lay in that direction, seventy miles away, a week's march, perhaps, over this rugged, treacherous ice—farther, I knew, than Bell could ever make it.

It was an uncomfortable and perilous business. Even in the calm, numbing cold seeped into my furs. One false step could hurl me to death—perhaps in the same frigid chasm that already had swallowed Bell. If a blizzard should rise, there was small chance that we could retrace a way through its blinding fury back to camp.

I pressed on steadily, however. During the months at the Pole my old friendship for Merry Bell had deepened. I understood the torture of guilt he felt for Mawson Kroll's old crime. And I had come to share his eager hope of thawing the polar world.

Sometimes I called Bell's name into the frosty silence, but there was no reply save some brittle echo from the ice peaks. The hours passed, and my hope ebbed away. Glancing back, I saw an ominous bank of haze blotting out the poleward stars.

A blizzard was on the way.

DESPAIRINGLY, I was about to turn back when I saw a tiny gleam of light, far off to the left. Thinking that it was Bell, perhaps helpless, making a signal with his flashlight, I turned toward it.

Half an hour of stumbling effort brought me to the beacon. It was Bell's pocket light, lying on the top of a lofty hummock and weighted with a block of ice. But he was not with it. The wavering trail of his boots led on across the snow, northward, toward the Mountains of Uranus.

But he must have left the light for a signal. Why?

The answer was a fluttering sheet of paper, pinned under the light. I snatched it out. A sheet torn from Bell's notebook, it was written awkwardly with ice-numbed fingers, addressed to me:

Dear Ron:

I can see the reflection of your light. I know you must be following. Please come no farther—it will only endanger your life. Let me go in peace.

You may have seen her—the wondrous being who came for me. If you did, you can understand. If you did not, no word of mine can tell you.

She is Maru-Mora, the Seeker, the last survivor of an elder people. She has wisdom older than the human race, and powers that science has not dreamed of. And she is alone.

She has come to me often, Ron, while I slept. She has taken me three times out of my body, to her dwelling on the mountain. Now she has called me again.

For ever.

This may be hard to understand, Ron. But I hope you will try, for we have been friends. I love Maru-Mora. I know she is non-human. Ours is no physical love, but a calling of kindred minds. And we are to be together.

I know already that this will cost my life, Ron. That is a small price, and I pay it cheerfully. I feared that you and the rest would think me insane. That is why I have said nothing. But please understand.

For I love the Seeker as I could never love any

woman. And life holds nothing more for me—you know that Mawson Kroll murdered my soul.

There is another reason, also, why I must go. I once hoped to thaw the polar ice, but that can never be. Maru-Mora has showed me the unthinkable horror that dwells beneath, waiting its chance to overwhelm the world. She says she warned you, Ron. For the sake of humanity, heed that warning!

Therefore I go, taking the secret of atomic power with me, lest it should fall into the hands of another Mawson Kroll. Good-bye, Ron. I am sorry to leave you. I beg you to watch Harding. The change in him is more diabolical than you suspect.

I am getting cold. Can't write more.

BELL.

THAT paper trembled as my hand held it in the silver funnel of light. With a strange mixture of feelings, I read it twice.

Maru-Mora! All the golden beauty of that elfin bust in its opalescent shell came back to me. I could see how such a man as Bell, lonely and estranged, might love that alien being with a passionate devotion.

Yet, Bell was a dear friend of mine. I could not see him surrender to an emotion so tragic, so hopeless. Ignoring the threatened blizzard, I followed his trail on into the north.

The surface for a space was more level. The tracks in the snow were clear. They showed that Bell was exhausted, reeling, staggering. This wild march had been too much for his unaccustomed strength. I knew that it would be difficult to get him safely back to camp before the blizzard struck.

It must have been an hour later when I saw—the Seeker!

Silently, she rose from a point on the trail ahead—a golden woman, scarlet-crested, flying in a vase of shining pearl. High and swiftly she soared away, straight toward one black rounded peak in the far-off Mountains of Uranus.

I stumbled fearfully ahead. At the spot from which she had risen, I found Merry Bell, lying motionless where he had fallen from a twenty-foot ice cliff. Dull red stained the snow about his head. His extremities were already frozen, but warmth was still in his body. I knew that he had lived until a few minutes before—until about the time I had seen that weird shining being fly back toward her mountain.

I cursed the Seeker, then, despite all that Bell had said of loving her, of giving his life willingly. For he had been a friend, and she had lured him out to die. . . .

I covered his body in a shallow grave, with a cross cut into the ice above his head, and whispered the Lord's Prayer over him. Bell had not been religious, nor was I. Yet the strangeness of that alien being, flying away from his dying body, had made me shudder with a superstitious fear.

Grief was heavy in me, and my senses dulled with a wondering dread, as I left the grave and turned wearily back toward camp. Bell's death, of course I thought, had ended the attempt to thaw the ice. I supposed that, as soon as the weather permitted us to level space for a take-off, we should fly back toward civilization.

That ominous bank of haze rose swiftly before me, however. And the blizzard struck, with insane sudden violence, before I had covered a fourth of the distance. Savage wind hammered me. Cold pierced like probing needles. Whipped ice-crystals blinded and stung.

In the teeth of it I struggled on. I was soon reeling with fatigue, but, already numb with cold, I dared not stop to rest. Wind whipped the drifts into strange configurations. I could not retrace my steps. Blundering along, blinded, I slipped into a black pit.

Snow fell with me, buried me, suffocating. I floundered about, gasping for breath. It cost me an hour's exhausting struggle to escape the chasm. Then I was dismayed to find that the compass, as well as my gun, had been lost in the snow.

The wind had grown harder, and, I thought, shifted. Without the compass, I knew, there was no hope of finding camp. I was lost in the blinding storm.

8. *The Thing in the Snow*

THE remainder of that march is like an evil dream: bitter cold, draining effort, screaming wind piercing through my furs, driving snow a cruel blinding mist. My body was numb. Sensations became vague. Sense of time and reality were gone.

Without the gyro-compass, there was small chance of finding the camp again. It was little more than the old stubborn will to live that kept me on my feet. My dulled mind, however, felt no surprize when the up-tilted wing of a plane loomed dark in the flickering cone of my light.

It was the *Austral Queen,* I thought, uncovered and blown out of her hangar by the fury of the storm. She would have to be moored and covered again. Dimly, I wondered if she had been damaged, if our ice-hewn shelter had survived the wind.

The others—Jerry, Harding, Veering—might be in need of aid. But the thin beam of my light, smothered in flying snow, revealed no familiar landmark. I didn't know which way to search. And I was too far exhausted for any continued effort.

Dazedly I staggered up the last frozen slope, against that blast of stinging, blinding ice, pried open the frost-locked door, and stumbled gratefully into the shelter of the slanting cabin.

I remember no more: I must have fallen immediately asleep. The wind had moderated a little when I woke. However cold, stiff, and weary, I was still alive. Reluctantly I stirred, to search for the others.

The plane lay on one side. The cabin was a confusion of broken instruments, equipment, and wreckage, covered with sifted snow. I clambered outside to investigate the extent of the disaster. The light's white finger played over the wreck. My heart sank. It was hopeless. One wing was altogether crushed. The plane was beyond repair.

The catastrophe staggered me. I couldn't understand it. Our ice-hangar had been constructed with habitual care. I had thought the plane safe from any possible freak of the wind.

My searching light quivered, stopped. There was something unfamiliar in the cambre of the intact wing, in the design of the crushed fuselage.

This wasn't the *Austral Queen* at all!

Lost, I had stumbled by sheer accident upon the wreck of some other plane. And I was still lost. In the gloom I clambered over the wreckage, found the shattered propeller, the motor hurled forward from its mount. I identified the ship: it was an old Albatross monoplane, twenty years out of date.

I scraped the crust of frost from the side of her crumpled fuselage, traced with the flashlight the painted letters: *Elida L——*

Elida Lee! I thrilled to a shudder of wondering dread. My boyhood came back, and the newspaper stories that first turned my mind to flying. Those had been the pioneer days of aerial exploration, when the exploits—or, too often, the deaths — of Lindbergh, Will Rogers, Wiley Post, Amelia Earhart, Amundsen, Ellsworth, Byrd — of them and many more, filled the front pages. And the "Flying Lees," as the papers called them, had been the bravest of that daring band.

I remembered their last flight. It was twenty years ago, when I was fourteen. Emulating the feat of the Russians, in making a highway of the top of the

world, they had left Capetown, planning to fly to New Zealand across the South Pole. Their radio had failed as they came over the ice-blocked coast of Enderby Land. The last interrupted message stated that they had decided to go on, in spite of the trouble. And they had never come back.

This shattered wreck, then, must be the coffin of those gifted flyers, man and wife, Wilbur and Elida Lee, whose dauntless skill had thrilled my boyhood!

Searching through the snow in the fuselage again, however, I did not find the gruesome things I expected. I uncovered navigation instruments, a hunting-rifle in its case, empty food cans, a little gasoline stove, blankets, and finally the frost-stiffened brief-case that held their records.

I saw that they must have survived the accident, living on in the poor shelter of the cabin. In the brief-case I found the diary of Wilbur Lee. Breathlessly, numb with the horror of that old tragedy and yet trembling with increasing amazement, I read the brief, inadequate notes the doomed flyer had written:

MARCH 18, 1939. Wrecked two days ago. Both well enough, but for my crushed foot. But there is no hope of rescue or escape, so late in the season. We must face that.

I was a fool—I see it now. And Elida was too good a sport to tell me so. This flight was a reckless thing. We were going to retire. This was the last throw.

It was the landing that cracked us up. We came down to examine a thing we saw on the snow. It looked like some prehistoric monster. It is near, though a drift hides it now. I shall examine it when my foot permits.

March 19. God knows why I write this. The odds are a thousand to one that no other eye will ever see it. Rescue is impossible. Yet there is a satisfaction in pretending to carry on.

Elida is brave. We should have been prepared for this. But we aren't. We had a trust in our luck. We never looked straight at the horrible reality. It couldn't happen to us. But it has happened—as surely as if we were already dead. There are supplies for two months. After that——

March 26. A week's blizzard. I had no heart to write. I tried to comfort Elida, though the truth may be that I am the more dependent on her calm strength. I was never made for such a trial as this. If it weren't for my foot——

March 27. We are weak already, from trying to conserve our rations, though why the urge to prolong our hopeless existence, God knows. We have the rifle. Two quick shots would solve our problem. Is that the better way?

Still I have not seen the Thing. I spent yesterday improvising a crutch, meaning to go. But this morning I found excuses to stay. Am I afraid?

March 28. Last night's wind removed the drift. The thing can be seen from the plane. It is incredible. Surely the earth never gave birth to such a monster. Did it land here, a visitor from Space, and freeze in the ice? So Elida suggests.

Alive, it must have stood twenty feet tall. God! it must have been frightful. Fortunate, if Elida is right, that it came down here, not in civilization.

March 30. Two days of blizzard. Bitter cold. We suffer. But it is a blessing, for drifting snow shuts out sight of the monster. That would drive us mad.

April 2. Last glimpse of the sun yesterday. We shall not see it again. Weak and hungry. What is the use?

April 3. Elida today confessed her state. A shock to me. She knew before we left Capetown, but said nothing because she didn't want to disappoint me

about the flight. It makes no difference now, for we can only die. But the tragedy is doubled.

April 4. Last night I did not sleep, considering the possibility that Elida, alone, might survive the winter. Surely another expedition will come with the sun. I have only to walk away on my crutch, while she sleeps. Perhaps it is my duty, for the sake of the child. Yet what hell it would be for Elida! Very scant rations, even for one. And she fears the monster more than I.

April 5. Elida must have read my mind. She begs me not to go—not to leave her alone with That. Better die together, she says. And so I gave my word.

April 15 (?). I have lost track of the terrible days. Weak. Delirium. One vision most persistent. Haunts the plane like a ghost. I have seen it three times. Elida also. Collective hallucination? Or are we going mad?

It appears like the head and shoulders of a tiny golden woman, rising from a conical shell. The shell flies above the snow. She sings. Elida says she is calling us to follow her across the snow. But it is death to leave the plane.

May (?). Food half gone. I insist we eat enough. No benefit in hours of agony. An effort at resignation. Would it be better to walk together into the blizzard? There is no hope. Yet Elida's love is a joy. She was praying today.

May (later). Maru-Mora came again. Elida calls her that. She sang again. It is a terrible thin crying, yet musical. Elida wanted to follow her. I restrained her by force. Maru-Mora will give us food, she says, and shelter. That I know is delirium.

The scaled black thing is still outside on the snow. It is real. I kept looking to see if it had moved, until Elida covered the window. I wonder whence it came. And when it was alive.

Later. The thing is still alive. It never moves, but I feel life in it. An indwelling horror. I know that it is waiting for us to die. Waiting. God! can it take us after death?

I want to take all our food and leave the plane. No hope of escape—I am helpless on the crutch. But I want to get as far as possible from the thing. I don't want to lie dead here beside it. For I have dreamed twice that we were lying stiff and cold, and it woke and stirred and came to eat our bodies. I have not told Elida that.

Later. Elida is gone. Maru-Mora was here again. She was singing, calling to Elida. I slept—it was because of this damned weakness; I had been putting food back. When I woke they both were gone.

I feel stronger now after eating. I am going to search for Elida. Probably I shall not find her. I know I can't go far on the crutch. But at least I shall die farther from the thing in the snow.

FAINTLY scrawled in a trembling hand, that was the last entry. Foreseeing his fate, Wilbur Lee had left his diary and gone to seek his wife, as I had followed Merry Bell. That was twenty years ago.

Maru-Mora! what manner of being was she? Splendid in her alien beauty, how many had she lured to death on the glaciers? Could she lead some vampire-life, feeding on those who followed her?

The diary had warned me of the thing waiting beside the wreck. I should have been prepared for it. Its stark reality, however, came with an impact of shattering violence.

The dark sky was almost clear again, although the bitter wind still swept a few wraiths of cloud across the wheeling stars. Like dying embers sprinkled with some chemical, the aurora burned with feeble,

changing, many-colored flames, beyond the poleward range.

The questing white finger of my light found the thing that had brought the Lees down to die, sixty yards from the wreck. Huge and monstrous, it loomed appallingly above the wind-carved drifts. I staggered a little way toward it, until amazed terror stiffened me.

For it was incredible.

And it woke all the horror of my most dreadful memory.

Barrel-like and hideous, the black-scaled body of it towered colossal above the ice. Thick tremendous cables, snake-like, its three giant limbs coiled fast about the projections of a shattered granite boulder.

Unmistakably, it was the Watcher! The same fearsome frozen being that Maru-Mora had shown me in that weird experience that I had tried to believe a dream, when she had also carried me down beneath the ice to witness the frightful horde of this monster's fellows, rigid in the ice that held their cyclopean ship.

The Watcher of the Tharshoon! I needed no more support of Maru-Mora's warning that the unthinkable invaders, now held motionless by her weapon of sleep, might wake again to attack the world.

Bitterly, vainly, I regretted my blind folly in bringing Harding's expedition to the Pole. And I was glad, in the rigor of horror that gripped me—almost glad—that Merry Bell was dead, so that his discovery of atomic power could not be used to thaw the ice.

I wanted to go closer to this frozen creature, to examine it in detail. But an inexplicable, overwhelming fear had come into me at the first glimpse of it. My heart was pounding. I had to put down an insane urge to run, a trembling fear that the monster would wake to pursue me.

Utterly irrational as I knew that dread to be, all the knowledge-thirst of the scientist in me could not overcome it. I did, nevertheless, examine the being as well as possible from where I stood.

A curious smooth ridge, black, glassy, and about two feet wide, belted the middle of it. Above were three curious protuberances, equally spaced, which, I imagined, must cover organs of sense. A hideous triangular snout projected above the great scales of its bulging upper hemisphere.

I noted a curious socket about each of the three limbs, below that glassy belt, which suggested that they had been retractable into the scaled black shell, so that the entire being was encased in the scaled armor of its elongated spheroid.

Its connection with any known order of terrestrial life was not apparent. I recalled, shuddering again, the suggestion on the diary that it had come across the gulf of space—and Maru-Mora's statement in the dream that the invaders had come, geologic ages past, from "Beyond."

I was glad to leave the thing. Yet alien horror crept behind me, as I started back to search for camp. Knowledge that it had not moved for long eons was inadequate defense against a disturbing childish fear that somehow it might wake and follow.

9. *The Eyes of Mawson Kroll*

A DISQUIETING thought came to hasten me—that Veering's crystal fossils might have been solidified by Maru-Mora's weapon of sleep; that Harding's efforts to revive them, through some ghastly accident, might wake the sleeping monsters.

Still I was lost.

I had found no serviceable compass in the wreck. My watch had stopped, I found, crushed; and, although the sky

was now clear, the stars, wheeling eternally above the pole, gave no hint of either time or direction.

The outcropping boulder, however, convinced me that I must be somewhere upon the same ridge upon which the camp was situated. For most of the Basin, I knew, was covered with many thousand feet of ice. If I could follow the ridge, then, and in the right direction, I might come upon our base.

Looking for the next visible granite ledge, in the direction I hoped was south, I struck out toward it. I had no hope of aid from camp, unless perhaps a light should be hung in Bell's tower. In fact, for the safety of the others, I had asked them not to leave camp for any cause.

Hour after hour I stumbled on, searching out one projecting ridge and then another. Hidden as they were by ice and drifts, it was never easy to identify them. And they became less frequent as I went on, so that I began to fear that I had taken the wrong direction.

I stopped once, made scalding tea on the alcohol burner, and thawed a little of the concentrated food in my pack. Struggling on again, I slipped into a numb, drugged fatigue in which my personal fate seemed to matter very little. Some aching restlessness had kept me ever wandering, searching. The black peace of death, it came to me, now so near, might be the goal I had sought. Still, however, a bitter rebellion rose against that idea, with thought of the dream-girl, Karalee.

If Maru-Mora were real, she must be also. And I loved her. It was the beacon of her white beauty, at the end, toward which I struggled.

I had expected no search to be made for me. I was surprized to see the ghostly flicker of a searchlight, far across the ice. Stumbling toward it, beckoning with my own light, I was distressed and alarmed to hear the terrified voice of Jerry Harding. Pain was in her weary calls, as well as horror.

My own troubles vanished before concern for her. I hastened to meet her, but she slipped down on the ice before I came to her.

She was unconscious. I carried her down into a little declivity where the wind struck less keenly, swiftly examined her. Plainly she was exhausted from her struggle across the snow. But more than that was the matter with her.

She had been mistreated, brutally. My blood boiled at sight of her injuries. One arm was dragging limply, broken. Blood was clotted inside her furs. Disfiguring her white face was the print of a boot, whose ice-calks had cut through lip and cheek to the bone.

Harding, the black suspicion came to me, must have gone completely mad, attacked her.

Her condition was alarming. She had internal injuries, I thought. Her pulse was very slow and weak. Her hands and feet were already white and stiff with frost.

Hastily I dug out a little shelter beneath the crust of a drift, carried her inside, and walled it up with blocks of snow. I did everything my small skill made possible: set the arm, put antiseptic on her lacerated face, rubbed her hands and feet, made hot tea over the little alcohol flame.

And she regained consciousness at last, gulped a little of the tea I held to her lips. Her gray eyes flickered open. She tried briefly to smile. Then her face went waxen pale again with pain and remembered horror.

"Ron, dear!" she whispered. "I knew I'd find you. I had to——"

The effort of speech seemed to exhaust her. Her eyes closed. Her head fell back on its pillow of snow. But I couldn't repress the savage question burning in me.

"Who did it?" I demanded. "Jerry, who hurt you?"

Her stricken eyes opened again, dark, distended, staring. Low and hoarse and terrible, her voice whispered the blackest name I knew:

"Kroll did it—Mawson Kroll!"

That grim name brought me a start. But I thought she must be out of her head.

"Don't try to talk, Jerry," I urged her, soothingly. "Just drink some more hot tea, and rest. You shouldn't have come—but I'll get you back to camp. Everything will be all right."

Wide and glazed with horror, her great eyes stared up at me. Quivering with pain, her blood-clotted lips moved again, whispering:

"No, it won't be, Ron. And I'm not delirious—I wish to God I were! After you were gone, Ron, I found out. And he saw. He tried to kill me—he did kill me."

Her dark eyes flickered with agony. She gulped painfully, went on:

"But I got away from him. I came to warn you, Ron, so that you can stop him. For he's a monster, Ron. He's not human. He's something—hideous! He lives only to crush and destroy. To kill, as he killed me——"

HER dreadful eyes closed again. Her face was very white.

"Quiet, Jerry." A lump was in my throat. "And don't you worry about Mawson Kroll. He is dead, you know that. He was Bell's assistant, who sold the bacteriophage to the Asiatics. He was caught, executed."

Her filmed, staring eyes came open again.

"No, he wasn't executed," she whispered. "He lives on, Ron—more terrible than ever. Before, with the bacteriophage, he murdered a million. Now, utterly mad, he plans to murder all the world!"

"But, Jerry——"

I was trying to calm her, but:

"Wait, Ron," her tortured whisper begged me. "Let me explain. I haven't—long."

Agony closed her eyes as she swallowed again. Her slender body quivered on the snow. In a moment, however, she looked at me again, caught a gasping little breath, and went on:

"You know how—how Aston has been changed?"

"Of course," I said. "Since his amnesia."

She shuddered.

"Many things he couldn't remember," she said. "I helped him carry on. His nature seemed strangely—ill. But I tried to bear with him."

"I know, Jerry."

For a little time she lay silent, gasping, in that tiny space beneath the snow. The alcohol flame had warmed it a little, now. My light cast a pale disk of silver on the roof. The wind was a far merciless howling.

Jerry Harding went on:

"His eyes—you know how he has said his eyes were weak, and worn dark glasses all the time? Well, after you had gone to follow poor Merry, he went on working over his crystal fossils, as if he didn't care whether either one of you came back. This morning I went into the laboratory—I was so lonely and anxious. Aston—*he* was working over the microscope, without the glasses. He looked up at me, with some sharp word.

"And I saw his eyes——"

Jerry Harding's torn bruised face was suddenly paler. Her eyes closed again. Her breath was a slow, tortured gasping. I waited, wishing in vain agony that I had the medical skill to aid her, until she sobbed:

"His eyes!

"They weren't Aston's eyes at all. They were hideously—changed! Aston's eyes were blue. And these were black. One of them was flecked with a queer terrible red all around the iris. The other had no iris—it was just a pool of terrible black.

"I had seen those eyes before. Once when Aston took me to Merry's laboratory, to hear about the bacteriophage, we met Mawson Kroll. He was a horrible little hunchback. He stared at me, and something made me sick with fear. I could never forget his eyes—they haunted my nightmares."

Her voice was a faint, hoarse rasp:

"Ron, these eyes, in my husband's face, were the terrible, mismated eyes of Mawson Kroll!"

10. The Stasis Ray

For a long time after she gasped those incredible words, Jerry Harding lay white-faced and silent in that tiny chamber under the snow. Her strength was ebbing. Certain that she was bleeding internally, I thought she might not speak again. But her slight form held an extraordinary strength; her desperate trek across the snow had already proven that.

An hour must have passed when she opened her eyes and looked at me again. Her small cold hand, which I had been rubbing, closed upon my fingers with a strong grasp. Her low voice, calmer now, steadier, went on as if she had not paused:

"A cold horror fell on me when I saw those eyes. I crouched back toward the door. And, before I could think, I gasped out that name:

" 'Mawson Kroll!'

"He looked startled, when I said that. His face—Aston's dear familiar face—went a little pale. Then slowly he began to laugh. It was Aston's laugh that I knew so well, but there was a terrible hard new ring of evil in it.

"And he spoke to me in a ghastly mocking voice.

" 'Well, Mrs. Harding,' he said, 'I've been wondering when you would find it out. The grafting of the optic nerve was impossible. My eyes were disguised, but they are my own.'

"I couldn't believe what I had seen, Ron. Or what he said. I tried to ask him if this were some dreadful joke.

" 'There was a joke, Mrs. Harding,' he told me. 'But it was on your husband—when they shot him for Mawson Kroll!'

He laughed a ghastly laugh, and I managed to whisper:

" 'You aren't—aren't really—Kroll?'

" 'But I am, Mrs. Harding.' His voice was gloating. It made my flesh crawl. He grinned at me—it was Aston's old dear smile, with a hideous leering twist. 'You have served me very usefully,' he said. 'But I have no further need of you. And now, while Dunbar is out of the way, is a very good time to dispose of you.'

"He started toward me. Fear had taken my voice. But I had to stop him. I managed to whisper:

" 'What do you mean? And how could you be Kroll?'

"And I stood there in the little laboratory under the ice, cowering back, while he told me the horrible thing. His smile—on my husband's face—was cruel, mocking, mad.

" 'You aren't deformed, Mrs. Harding,' he began. 'You don't know what it means to be a cripple—not yet. But I know.' His voice was terrible, bitter. 'The world made me suffer, Mrs. Harding. And I determined, when I was still a child, that the world would pay for every slight and sneer and insult.

" 'I bargained once to be made Em-

peror of America. But I was betrayed. The Asiatic command was too chicken-hearted to use the bacteriophage—until it was too late for victory. And that defeat is another thing that must be avenged.

" 'The frightened human vermin wanted the life of Mawson Kroll. But I wasn't ready to die. Not unavenged. And I was able to turn that defeat into a victory.

" 'For one of the Asiatic secret agents, who had aided me in the matter of the bacteriophage, was a doctor, famous in his own country—famous for an experiment he had performed publicly only upon animals, but secretly, and with entire success, upon human beings.

" 'That was the transplantation of living brains. He had developed a radically new technique, using Zymoff's vitacolloids to suture the severed nerves and vessels. His Government had sent him to America so that this skill might serve his country. In a New York apartment was a secret operating-room, where he had put Asiatic brains in the heads of two American officers—who became most valuable spies.

" 'You must remember the body of Mawson Kroll, Mrs. Harding. It was not a desirable abode. Often I had admired your husband's splendid physique—as I had admired you.'

"He snickered then, Ron, with a dreadful leer.

" 'It was all very simple,' he said. 'A spy reported the arrest of Meriden Bell. I knew that suspicion would fall on his assistant. So our machinery went into action.

" 'Your husband had the habit of working late at his laboratory. One night two of our agents removed him to the secret operating-room. I had prudently gone there already, having planted the necessary clues. My distinguished Asiatic colleague, glad of another chance to try his novel technique, removed our two brains, and transferred each to the other skull!

" 'Convalescence, in each case, was swift and satisfactory. Mawson Kroll—with your husband's brain in his skull—was carried to the Mexican border, drugged, and released. One of our agents won the confidence of the American Government by aiding in his capture. Surgical precautions had been taken against his being able to give a very intelligent account of his identity—a few cubic inches of brain-tissue mislaid! You know what happened to him.

" 'As for myself, as soon as skull and scalp were healed, I walked along a highway and said I didn't know who I was. You identified me, Mrs. Harding. You were very kind. You took me into your home. You gave me your husband's position, his fortune, and—yourself.'

"He laughed again, with a gloating satanic triumph.

" 'You made it possible for me to regain the confidence of Meriden Bell, to secure the advantage of his second great discovery, which is even more wonderful than the bacteriophage——"

AGHAST at that, I interrupted the low weary voice.

"But he hasn't got Merry's atomic discovery," I protested. "Because Merry is dead—and he took the secret with him."

The terrible dark eyes of Jerry Harding looked up at me, from her cold bed in that tiny snow-cavern. She coughed when she tried to speak again, and I saw dreadful red on her lips.

"But he didn't," she whispered. "He left all his apparatus. It wasn't finished. But Tommy Veering is very brilliant, Ron. And he serves Kroll like a dog. He has studied the equipment, already, and worked out the principles of it. I heard him promise—*him*, that he could go ahead and thaw the ice!"

That was a terrific jolt to me. It meant that Bell had died in vain. It raised danger that the monstrous sleepers might yet be wakened. But I tried to conceal my shuddering fear, tried to calm my voice, as I asked:

"Then what happened, Jerry? How were you—hurt?"

Her face, save for its wound, was white again with agony. She made an effort to speak, and coughed again, terribly, spitting red froth. I wiped her lips, and she lay back for a long time, almost motionless, with her eyes closed. It must have been half an hour before she breathed my name:

"Ron?"

"Don't talk, Jerry," I urged her. "It hurts you too much."

"I must tell you these things, Ron," she whispered faintly. "That is why I came. Then I can rest."

Her tortured eyes looked for a long time up at my face, with a pleading in them that was heart-rending, almost as if they tried to convey her thought without the agony of speech. She went on at last, laboriously:

"He—Kroll in Aston's body—told me that he was going to kill me, Ron. 'Because you sneered at me when you saw me in my own body, Mrs. Harding,' he said. I told him that wasn't true. I had only pitied his deformity. But it made no difference.

"Because Kroll — Kroll's brain — is mad. Insane!

"I was too terrified to move. He came at me, slowly, horribly, like some gaunt beast stalking me. Fires of hell were blazing in his black, mismated eyes. Once he laughed a little, hideously.

"At first I couldn't make a sound. But finally I screamed for Veering, who was working up at Bell's tower. He came to the door and looked in. Kroll cursed him, and he went back again. He is Kroll's creature."

Jerry Harding's eyes were closed again. He. gasping, bubbling breath was agony to hear. It was a long time before she could go on.

"He took me in his hands. He has a terrible strength, for Aston was a powerful man. He—he twisted me. I didn't scream again. I knew it was no use, and I didn't want to give him that satisfaction.

"I don't know all that he did. Twice I lost consciousness. The second time I came to, I was on the floor. He was gasping and grunting like some mad beast, kicking and trampling me. Then Veering came in again—but not to help me. He had news for *him*.

" 'I've got it, Harding!' he was shouting. 'I've got the wave-formula for the stasis ray. The space-warp projector will run, with adapters, off Bell's atomic battery. I can create the stasis, or unlock it. A reversible reaction. And I've revived the fossils—see them crawling!'

"He paid no attention to me, lying on the floor. He was holding out his hand, with those tiny things creeping over the palm—he had made them come alive!

"Kroll seemed queerly excited at that. He left me, and hurried with Veering back to the tower. I heard them say something about having the stasis ray ready for you, Ron, if you came back.

"I guess they thought I was helpless, dying. And I was—almost. But I knew that I must warn you, or they would do something terrible to you when you came back—with that ray. And I had to tell you about—Kroll."

Her voice was very weak, now. I was leaning forward to catch the gasping words.

"When they were gone, I made myself stand up. I got into my furs, and found a light. I had watched you go after Merry. I started in the same direction. It

was hard to walk, Ron. One arm is broken, I think. And I—hurt—inside.

"I knew that I was dying, Ron. But I came on. On——"

Her darkened eyes flickered shut again. She slipped back into unconsciousness. Trying to do something for her injuries, I shuddered with a black rage against Mawson Kroll. All her poor body was evidence of his savage cruelty. It had taken fortitude beyond all telling for her to come to meet me.

For many hours I watched beside her, tried to keep her warm. I knew that her life was flowing away, but I had neither skill nor equipment to do anything for her internal hemorrhage. I had not expected her to speak again, but her eyes fluttered open at last, while I felt her failing pulse. Faintly she whispered:

"Promise me, Ron——"

She coughed weakly, gasped terribly for breath. I wiped the red foam from her lips, waited. An agony of urgency was burning in her glazing eyes. Finally:

"Promise, Ron," she breathed again, "to kill this monster—in my husband's body—before he uses this new power—for something more dreadful!"

"I promise, Jerry," I said.

Her face relaxed, then. The dark shadow of horror went out of her eyes. Beneath that cruel laceration, I saw a smile almost gay—the old smile of Jerry Ware. And suddenly I realized that she was dead.

11. The Waking of the Watcher

When I had done all that I could do for Jerry Harding, I left her there in the rude little ice-cave in which she had died, and set out to keep the promise I had made her; or at least to try, so long as I lived. For, summing up the odds, I saw their balance against me.

Kroll, as I shall call him now, and Veering were both strong men, equipped with firearms as well as this new weapon, and desperately bent upon whatever incredible scheme Kroll's mad brain had conceived. Jerry had made it clear that they already planned me harm.

And I was below par, physically. For perhaps two days and nights I had hardly slept at all, nor eaten adequately. I was exhausted from continual effort and nervous strain. And both my feet, from prolonged exposure, had become somewhat frostbitten, making walking very painful.

Moreover, I was unarmed. Now, however, I recalled the hunting-rifle I had seen in the wrecked *Elida Lee*. For all its twenty years on the ice, it had looked to be in good condition. And I decided, now, to return to the wreck and get this weapon.

Our camp lay a few miles to the south of me. The cracked-up plane was some greater distance back north along the ridge. I thought that I could get the rifle and reach camp, if the weather turned no worse, within forty-eight hours.

I had never killed a man, and a faint shudder ran through me at thought of it. But memory of Jerry Harding's injuries kept my resolution hard.

My feet made travel difficult. The weather remained clear, although a shifting bitter wind blew constantly. Huge glittering diamonds, the stars wheeled endlessly about the zenith. The sky was a frozen bowl of luminous sapphire. Green and mysterious, the living tongues of the aurora australis leapt up unceasingly beyond the dark and distant mountains.

Utter exhaustion forced me to stop long before I had come to the wreck. I cut through the frozen crust of a drift, excavated a little room, slept there, and ate the little food left in my pack.

The wind had fallen when I emerged. Savagely cold, the air itself seemed to glitter with frost. The stars swam im-

mense and brilliant in a dome of purple-blue. I was limping on again, when I saw the glimmer of a lantern ahead of me, far in the north.

Perplexed, I waited in the shelter of an ice hummock. At last I could make out two men, one of them dragging the sledge. They came toiling nearer. I saw that the lank, gigantic man who stalked ahead was Mawson Kroll. And it was Tommy Veering dragging the rude sledge, like a willing beast of burden.

They must have been out to search for Jerry, I thought, and were now returning. My first impulse was to hide and let them go by. But something in me rebelled at such cowardly skulking.

I had promised Jerry to kill Mawson Kroll. I meant to keep that promise. But I had no intention of trying to get him from ambush. When the time came I would see that we both were fairly armed, speak my accusation to his face, and let the best man win.

Another thing: I could not believe that they were prepared to kill me on sight. Kroll would not know that Jerry had talked to me. My polar experience and my skill as a pilot certainly would make me more valuable alive than dead. And I still hoped to make some successful appeal to Tommy Veering's humanity.

Such considerations prompted me to abandon my first plan of getting the rifle from the wreck. It had been by no means certain, anyhow, that I had strength left to carry it out.

When they had come within a hundred yards of me, then, I flashed my light—it was the one Jerry had brought—and called out:

"Harding! Veering! This is Dunbar!"

The instant reply was the orange-red flare of a gun. A shattering blow struck my shoulder. The light went spinning out of my hand. I staggered backward, trying to get my balance, and pitched into a ten-foot crevasse. My head struck the ice a stunning blow.

I lay there, half covered with the snow that had fallen with me, too numb with pain to move. Through the stinging air, I heard frost crackling under cautious feet. The white blade of a flashlight stabbed into the fissure, found me.

I heard Tommy Veering's flat nasal voice:

"Here he is, Doctor Kroll! You got him!"

Doctor Kroll! So Veering knew the truth—and was willing still to serve his infamous master. Other feet grated on the ice, and I heard the voice that had been Harding's:

"Well, that's an end of Captain Dunbar. We saw where he buried Bell. And Harding's slut must be dead by now."

Veering's voice said:

"Then it is just we two."

"We two." I thought that other familiar voice had changed, like the eyes, until it was strange with the intonation of Mawson Kroll. "We two—against the world!

"And now I have power, Veering. Bell's atomic beam, and the stasis ray, and now these others, as we rouse them."

A dreadful triumphant ring of madness had come into that altered voice.

"Power enough! There'll be an end of mankind, Veering. How I hate the verminous breed! Now these others shall have their chance. And I'll rule them with the ray."

"Yes," began Veering, "we'll rule——"

Harshly strident, Kroll's voice cut him off:

"Get to your traces! Quick, now!"

Frost crackled again as they walked away. Their voices dimmed: Kroll's sharp and loud, Veering's grovelingly acquiescent. I caught some puzzling reference to

a guest they expected, but the rest of the sentence was lost.

I lay a long time there in the crevasse, after they had gone, dazed as much by Kroll's mad plan to destroy mankind as by the blow on my head. At last I struggled dazedly upright. The bullet, I discovered, had glanced from the leather pack-strap; my shoulder was merely bruised.

Reeling with my still-throbbing head, I climbed painfully out of the fissure, and limped on toward the wreck. A wall of black despair had risen before me. There seemed small chance indeed that I could stop Kroll's mad scheme. But I must not give up.

It could have been no more than half a dozen miles to the wreck. Yet, footsore and exhausted as I was, it was a heartbreaking march. I slept once on the way, but had nothing more to eat.

TWENTY hours must have passed, when I came into the vicinity where I had left the shattered plane beside the frozen monstrous form of the Watcher. The sky was still clear, the circling stars great diamond sparks in a haze of sapphire frost. A brilliant arch of the aurora stood below the Southern Cross, like the façade of some unimaginable palace of crystal light.

In its soft radiance, I made the terrible discovery.

I recognized the shattered black rock upon which the gigantic hideous form of the Watcher had stood, frozen through so many ages. But it was vacant—the monstrous shape was gone.

Was the doom already begun? Had Kroll and Veering been already to wake the creature, with their newly discovered equipment, when I met them on the ice?

Feverishly, with that question battering at my sanity, I searched for the *Elida Lee*. But it also was gone. Where it had been I found a curious hollow in the ice. Lying in the bottom of it were a few blackened and corroded scraps of metal—fragments from the engine-block and landing-gear of the wrecked plane.

Of the gun I had come to seek no visible trace was left.

What happened to the plane? What powers of immemorial evil had Kroll's mad ambition released? Numbed and bewildered, stunned by the impact of alien dread, I was still standing on the brink of that inexplicable pit in the ice, when I saw another astounding thing.

Incredibly strange against the colored wings of the aurora, it came flying above the white ice-scape—an immense black balloon-shape, elongated, and belted with a wide band of violet fire cold as the aurora.

It dropped a little, swerved toward me. There was a strange slow pulsation in that frozen girdle of purple light, and the thing lifted and fell a little as it flew, to the same queer rhythm, so that I thought the belt of light must be its organ of locomotion.

Heavy and dull with a fascinated and incredulous dread, I stumbled back from it, without taking my eyes from it to watch where I went, until I realized with a start that I had come to the brink of a narrow black crevasse.

Swiftly it swept toward me. I saw the hideous, triangular snout that projected from the top of it, saw the immense black scales that covered its bulging armor. And understanding came to me like a black flood of horror.

This was the Watcher!

The black frozen monster of the rock, come to fearsome life! The great tentacles had been retracted, so that the thing was all contained in the black spheroid which flew through the unguessed agency of the shining belt.

Above that band of frigid violet, a

black-scaled flap lifted suddenly. Behind it was a huge, triangular pool of ice-green fire. A malevolent eye, luminous and pupilless!

Dread had held me hypnotized. But motion came back to me, at the unveiling of that eye, with a shock of panic fear. I flung myself flat behind an ice hummock, scrambled desperately toward the shelter of the crevasse behind.

That frightful triangular eye, however, must have seen me. It had been already luminous, and now a strange ray of pale green poured out of it. It struck the ice where I had stood. A queer little cloud condensed there, out of the beam—a swirling mist like dust of malachite. It thickened, and the ice shone green beneath it. It settled, faded. And the hummock was there no longer.

Many cubic yards of ice were gone—destroyed.

It was the green eye of the Watcher, I knew now, that had obliterated the *Elida Lee*.

Cold with horror, shuddering, helpless, I pushed myself deeper into the narrow fissure that concealed me. Curiously, even in that desperate moment, my brain seemed to take refuge from horror by pondering the cause of that dread annihilation. Atoms were practically all vacant space, I recalled; and Bell's own experiments had proved that their fragile energy-lattice could be collapsed, destroyed. Was that the explanation?

The thing hung motionless for a moment. I ceased to breathe. The thump of my heart and the rush of my blood seemed alarming sounds, so loud they must betray me. But the creature lifted in a moment, the flap falling again over that triangular eye.

Rising and sinking a little, to the pulsations of the purple band, it flew away southward, toward our camp—toward Mawson Kroll—its master?

After that, I didn't know what to do. Utter defeat was upon me. Strength and hope were both exhausted. It was all my own fault, I thought bitterly, for not heeding Maru-Mora's warning. But no use in thinking that. No use in anything.

It seemed to make no difference when a lurid wall of cloud rolled like an overwhelming wave across the purple sky, and flying snow cut my face with a savage whip. I knew that I could not survive another blizzard. But that didn't matter any more.

For I had failed.

12. The Coming of Karalee

I MUST have wandered for some time after the blizzard struck. I set out at first to return to camp, vaguely planning some surprize attack. But I was lost before I had gone a dozen yards. I staggered on, upon feet so numb I could feel their agony only dimly, trying merely to keep the blood moving in my veins.

Faintly I remember plunging into some unseen crevasse, then struggling vaguely to extricate myself, before surrender to fatigue and despair.

Then there is a singular dream.

I thought that I floated somewhere off in space. There were splendid stars, remote and cold in the abyss of velvet black; and the earth was a small globe beside me, misty and greenish. Down upon it came the Watcher.

Swift and monstrous, that violet-belted barrel-shape seemed large as the very planet. Suddenly, as it approached, the three black tentacles were thrust out of their sockets, and grasped the earth.

They impaled it upon the hideous triangular snout that crowned the headless entity. The planet shrank, like a fruit from which the juice is sucked. And it was consumed.

Then the monster came toward me, fly-

ing through the black vastness of space. Its purple belt was shining. A green huge eye, like a triangle of fire, stared from the upper hemisphere. It held me in a fascination of horror, so that I could make no effort to escape.

The black whip of one long tentacle reached again from its socket, and coiled about me like a snake, and dragged me helpless toward that impaling, sucking beak.

But something came to save me, ere I died. A yellow star moved amid the diamond hosts, and sped toward me. It was Maru-Mora: the golden elfin queen, flying in her pearly shell. Her eery piping quavered through the void of space, and the black monster was suddenly congealed again into the rigidity of stone.

I slipped out of that suddenly frozen tentacle, and fell through the dark abyss. The stars swept up about me like dust motes in a draft. They were gone. I was lost and alone in universal night.

The darkness was cold. An icy rigor crept into me, and I knew that I was dying. But a voice called to me through the emptiness. It was the eery piping of Maru-Mora, and it said: *Awake and rise up!*

I did awake. I lay on the bottom of the ice-fissure into which I had fallen. The sheer dark walls rose ruggedly about me, and above, in a streak of purple-black sky flushed now and then with the aurora, I could see the faint stars of Octans.

The cold was reality. It had stiffened all my body. Movement was sheer agony. But yet, such was the urgent pressure of that command in my dream, I dragged myself up out of the snow and clambered painfully from the crevasse.

Peering about over the ghostly waste of the glaciers—wondering bewilderedly if I could really have heard Maru-Mora singing—I saw a glowing point coming toward me from the north.

I waited, curious and somewhat apprehensive. The sky was clear again, though without moderation of the bitter cold; and faintly, far beyond the approaching light, I could see the Mountains of Uranus.

Had it come from there?

The point became presently a little cloud of golden radiance, creeping over the snow. And within it, at last, I made out a queer-looking sledge, with a white-clad figure running behind it.

The strange vehicle came swiftly nearer, its runners making a clear ringing sound on the ice. Its motive power was not visible. The little cloud of light that surrounded it, moved with it, was equally puzzling.

But my eyes were upon the trim, white-furred driver, who sometimes ran behind, guiding the sledge by an upright handle at the rear, and sometimes, when the ice was smoother, stepped on to ride.

Blood was beginning to thump hard in my veins. For the sledge came from the direction of Maru-Mora's pylon. And that slim figure, running in the fog of coruscating golden atoms, was thrillingly familiar.

She was—Karalee! Karalee, whom I had seen only in that warning vision, whose very reality I had tried to deny—yet whom I had loved, longed for bitterly.

After a speechless, incredulous moment, I ran stumbling to intercept her, wildly shouting her name. She saw me. She stopped the sledge, in its haze of golden light, and came running to meet me.

Her tall slender body was all in pure white fur. A wondering eager gladness shone in her deep blue eyes. She was more beautiful than I had dreamed her.

She stopped before me, and a mittened hand caught at her heart.

"Ron Dunbar!" she cried softly. "You are alive—alive! Maru-Mora promised

me that I should find you by the way. But I was afraid you would be dead."

The choking pain in my throat would not let me speak.

Trembling, faint with an eager joy I had never felt before, I put my arm around her shoulders. I drew her to me, and kissed her lips. Warm, quivering, they answered. It seemed right, inevitable, that our greeting should be thus. For we were not strangers met, but old friends —yes, lovers—reunited.

She held me back from her, when we had kissed, and regarded me with great compassionate eyes.

"Ron, my darling! You are so white and weak. I'm glad that I hastened."

I stood reeling before her, but trying to look as fit as possible.

"Come," she urged. "Warm yourself. And we shall eat."

I limped, with her aid, into the golden cloud that clung to her sledge. It filled my body with an immediate, deeply penetrating warmth—its diathermal effect must have been similar to that of high-frequency Hertzian waves.

Relaxation came with that warmth. I wanted to sleep again. Yet a sharp concern touched me: fear for Karalee. For we were near my former companions and the monstrous thing they had awakened.

"Where are you going, Karalee?" I asked, and warned her: "Ahead of you lies danger."

"Wait, Ron," she said. "You must eat."

From somewhere under the white tarpaulin which covered the bulky load of the sledge, she drew a great metal urn, and from it filled two crystal bowls with a hot thick fluid. One of them she gave me, with a handful of brown wafers. It was a concentrated soup, with a pungent flavor of mushrooms. Eagerly I sipped it, and another bowl.

A vast lazy relaxation filled me, as we leaned back against the tarpaulin, in that strange warming mist. But my sense of danger persisted, and I asked the girl's mission again.

"From her place on the mountain," she told me, "Maru-Mora saw the waking of the Watcher. She perceived the doom which she had foreseen close upon her and all the world.

"She sent me down to deal with the man who has the body of another. And she came after me, while I rested by the way, and told me that you were about to die. She showed me where you lay fallen in the snow, and gave me permission to pause and save your life."

"She did?" I broke in, wondering. "But this has happened because I ignored her warning. Has she—forgiven?"

"She has need of you," said Karalee, rather enigmatically.

"You say you are going to deal with Kroll?" I demanded. "How?"

For answer she rose to loosen the tarpaulin that covered the sledge, and laid it back in a manner almost reverent, saying:

"This is Maru-Mora's treasure."

It was a huge, strange-looking chest that she had uncovered. Eight feet long by three in width, it was massively constructed of golden-yellow metal. It was enameled with strange figures in red, blue, and black, among which predominated a curious spiral emblem. These designs were half obliterated, however. The chest was worn, battered, and stained with a greenish patina—the scars, I knew, of ages beyond comprehension.

"It is older," the girl whispered solemnly, "ten times older than the race of man."

From inside her clothing she produced a massive time-stained key of the same golden metal, and turned it in the lock.

"These are the priceless things that Maru-Mora has kept from her own

world," Karalee said, "which was here before the ice."

I helped her lift the great battered lid —and my breath went out in a gasp of awe. For this coffer held the wealth of a lost world. The golden rays that bathed us shimmered back redoubled from such splendor as I had never dreamed of.

There were pearls, bushels of pearls, many-colored, larger and more perfect than I had ever seen. There were shells of a delicate nacreous beauty, and wondrous jewels fashioned into the likeness of shells—Maru-Mora's people, I thought, must have risen from the sea.

There were jeweled robes of spun silver, and a great splendid sword of hard yellow metal. There were strange heavy cylinders, which I knew from their blue-white color to be platinum, inlaid with the blue of lapis lazuli in intricate spiral patterns.

There were figurines of beings like Maru-Mora, the fluted conical shells of silver-white metal, queerly human-like busts of yellow gold, crests of blazing ruby. There were odd-shaped vessels cut from jewels—from monstrous diamonds, sapphires, and emeralds; utensils, and some, I thought, lamps.

There were other things, strange in shape or half hidden beneath the rest, that I had not identified when Karalee lowered the massive lid. My imagination was staggered, my eyes blinded by those precious scintillations.

The mere intrinsic value of jewels and metal, I knew, would be tremendous. And the historical, the archeological value of what I had seen was beyond all calculation.

"These things," the girl was saying gravely, "Maru-Mora has preserved in memory of her world, that is lost. But now she has sent me to give them up for her, that the evil Tharshoon may not be wakened."

"Eh?" I muttered, still staggered with the mental impact of that treasure. "What's that?"

"I am taking it to the man Kroll," she said. "It is all to be his—if he will let the Watcher sleep again, destroy his apparatus, and depart for ever from this land."

I LOOKED for a long time, wonderingly, into the clear blue light of her eyes, and then beyond into the purple north, where in the dream I had seen the Seeker in her pylon. Such an effort to buy peace, I knew, meant surely that she had no weapon against the evil power Kroll had gathered.

"It's a large reward," I said. "But how does she know that Kroll will play fair?"

"No man," she said, "having Maru-Mora's treasure, could desire more."

"He shouldn't," I said. "But I think Kroll will."

The girl's blue eyes looked at me squarely—they were warm kind human eyes, but deep in them was something remote and alone, some reflection of the Seeker's purple orbs.

"That problem is yours," she told me gravely. "For you are to go with me, to aid me in dealing with him. And you are to return with him, to your own land, and see that he does not come back."

"That shows a touching confidence in my abilities," I said rather doubtfully. "But we can try."

"Now we must go on," she said. "Maru-Mora warned me to hasten, before Kroll has carried his plan too far to abandon it. But before we start, Ron," her voice was suddenly soft and low, "I have a gift for you."

She slipped off the gauntlet of white fur that covered her slim lower arm, and took from her wrist a little trinket, which she handed to me.

It was a little oblong block of argent

metal, heavy as silver, but faintly self-luminous. Cut in the top of it, filled with red enamel, was the curious spiral design which appeared to be the Seeker's emblem. Its pierced ends were attached to a flat metal chain.

Seeing from the way the girl handled it that it was precious to her, I hesitated to accept it.

"Karalee," I protested, "you must-n't——"

"Put it on." Her voice was husky, gravely urgent; her blue eyes bright with tears. "If you love me—wear it, Ron. Promise me you will never take it off."

"I promise, Karalee."

Quivering, her fingers fixed it on my wrist. I kissed her again, tenderly. Her eyes were filled with joyous tears.

Karalee, my darling! If I had known the meaning and the cost of that gift——

13. *Blue Star of Doom*

WE STARTED on at once toward the camp.

When Karalee saw how I limped, she made me take off my boots and smear my frostbitten feet with a gray ointment she gave me, which eased their pain immediately.

Despair rode with us, from the first. It was clear that Kroll's mad ambition, aided by Veering's strangely devoted genius, had already seized overwhelming forces. Our mission was Maru-Mora's last desperate play, and one foredoomed to fail.

Yet I clung to the desperate hope of some odd chance to strike. If Kroll let us open the great chest in his presence, the heavy golden sword lay just beneath the lid. If I could reach it, one second——

Karalee showed me how to control the sledge, with two small levers on the upright. We took turns, one steering it while the other rode seated on the tarpaulin that covered the chest.

It was a remarkable vehicle. Its method of propulsion I never learned, but it must have been some directional repulsion between the silvery runners and the surface beneath. The snow in its track was compacted, and left shining with a pale silvery phosphorescence that endured for several seconds—doubtless the residue of whatever radioactive or sub-atomic reaction it was that drove the sledge.

Its speed on smooth ice might have been twelve or fifteen miles an hour. Over this welter of hummocks and fissures, however, we made no more than three.

The warming golden mist, Karalee told me, came from a square black box under the tarpaulin. She showed me how its intensity was regulated by the turning of a knob.

"We must hasten," she said again. "Kroll is embittered with mankind. He thinks to give the planet to those others. Once he has awakened them, we can never turn him back."

We toiled on. The sledge pitched and labored over the hummocks. Sometimes we both had to push and steady it, to get it safely past a crevasse. Sometimes it glided smoothly on ringing runners, and we both could ride.

"Karalee," I asked hesitantly, once when I was steering and she rode before me on the chest, "there is something I want to ask—if I may?"

She smiled and waited. Her smooth white face was bright and beautiful, her blue eyes almost gayly inquiring. But it was queerly difficult to frame my question.

"How long, Karalee—how long have you—known Maru-Mora?"

She looked at me wonderingly. White teeth flashed in the starlight, and suddenly she laughed.

"All my life, Ron."

"Then are you——"

Dread closed my throat, but she laughed again.

"But I'm not so old as she, if that's what you mean."

Relieved, but still wondering, I demanded:

"How did you come here? Where did you learn English?"

The smile vanished, her face was wistfully sad.

"I learned it from my mother," she said. "Maru-Mora guided my mother across the ice, to the dwelling of those who served her in the old days. I was born there. My mother lived and cared for me, until the going of the twelfth sun. Then—then there was only Maru-Mora. But she was kind. She taught me many things."

The girl had been fumbling in the breast of her furs again. She drew out a worn little make-up compact, and snapped it open.

"Here is my mother."

Carefully she handed me a tiny snapshot. Faded and yellowed, it showed a woman whose lean, laughing, reckless features seemed somehow faintly familiar. I turned it over. On the back of it, in fine script, was written:

"To her lonely daughter Carol, from Elida Lee."

Elida Lee! Slowly, numbed again with the horror of that old tragedy of the ice, my mind filled out this fantastic ending to the story of the "Flying Lees."

Karalee was Carol Lee!

That did not end the wonder of her—nothing ever would. But it removed some little barrier of strangeness, made her humanity complete.

"I saw the machine that brought your mother here," I told her. "And I knew of your parents when I was a child. They were brave and famous flyers. The world will make you welcome, Carol, when we go back. If——"

An aching constriction stopped my throat.

"Carol," I whispered, "if you——"

She must have read the question in my eyes. For her own were suddenly misted with tears, and said softly:

"Yes, I'll go with you, Ron. Maru-Mora has promised. If we can deal with Kroll——"

And she had leaned to kiss me again, when the blue star flamed out ahead. It was miles away, on a summit of the long granite ridge that jutted here and there through the ice. It flickered once, and when it dimmed I could see the tall metal tower that supported it.

"What is it, Ron?"

The girl's eyes were dark with apprehension.

"It is the atomic radiator that Merry Bell invented," I told her. "Bell is dead. But they have finished the machine. Kroll has started it—to thaw the ice."

"And to wake the Tharshoon!" Her low voice was hoarse with dread. "We must hasten, Ron—or we shall be too late."

WE KEPT the sledge plunging on across the rugged ice, as fast as it would go, toiling and straining to guide it safely.

The tiny orb of blue ahead became no larger, but its radiance became searing, terrific. All around us the ice was brilliant with it, the frost splintering its rays into unimaginable sapphire splendor.

The light shone poleward to the Mountains of Despair. Northward it lit the black distant peaks of the Uranus Range, and the nameless rounded summit where Maru-Mora dwelt.

The air became warm, as we struggled desperately on. Carol turned off the golden radiance of her heater. Our furs be-

came uncomfortable. The fairy sheen of the frost was lost, as it began to melt, leaving bare black ice.

And still that fearful, blinding radiance increased. It blistered our faces, inflamed our dazzled eyes. We had to replace our discarded furs—now as protection against the heat.

For Meriden Bell's great invention was proving successful beyond his wildest dreams. It seemed fantastically incredible that such terrific heat could come from the hydrogen atoms in a few pounds of ice. But the glacier retreated almost visibly from the ragged black teeth of the granite ridge. Pools of slush soon flowed together, in deepening icy torrents.

Still we labored on.

One great boulder, when we struggled by it with the wallowing sledge, proved to be no boulder at all, but a tremendous monument of gray stone, which must have been set upon this buried mountain before the coming of the ice. The long eons had shattered it, but still we could distinguish the massively sculptured shell and crusted bust of a molluskan being like Maru-Mora.

When Carol saw it, her lovely face set with fearful desperation.

"The ice is going fast," she sobbed. "We must hasten. The dead cities of Maru-Mora's people will soon be uncovered, as the destroying Tharshoon left them. And then the victorious ship of the invaders, and the hideous mound city they were building. And they will wake, as the Watcher did. And we shall be too late!"

We went on. Even before the thawing started, our progress had been slow enough. Now it was exasperating. Whatever propelled the sledge, it would hardly function on the slushy surface of the exposed ice. When it slipped into a pool, or one of the increasing icy torrents, we had to wade or swim and drag it.

The slush remained ice-cold, although the air was now heated to a searing wind. We were frozen below, blistered above, exhausted with desperate effort, taut with fear of the danger ahead.

There had been only a few miles to go, however. And at last, faint and reeling with fatigue, we came over a ridge near the camp. Bell's spidery metal tower stood now on a stark, naked peak of granite, supporting that small blue orb of terrific flame. Our ice-hewn shelter, of course, was already gone. A white tent had been pitched below the little sheet-metal shelter which covered the atomic battery.

The *Austral Queen,* I saw with relief, had been drawn up out of the slush, on the bare black rock. If Kroll should accept Maru-Mora's amazing offer, I thought—or if he gave me an opportunity to use the golden sword—we might soon be aboard her, flying back toward civilization, all this horror no more than an evil dream. Carol and I. . . .

Then I saw the Watcher.

It rose up from behind the white tent, the monstrous black-scaled spheroid of it belted with pulsating purple. One huge malefic eye, a cold triangle of terrible green, stared from beneath its uplifted flap.

Carol, beside me, stiffened and gasped with unutterable terror. And I was cold with fear of the pale beam of dread destruction that I had seen strike from that baleful organ.

But the creature dropped back again, to the tent. Beside it, gesturing to it, I saw the lank powerful body that had been Aston Harding's, clad now, against that searing radiation, in white linens, dark glasses, and pith helmet. The huge green eye winked evilly. A black tentacle whipped out of its socket, seemed to gesticulate, seized a pencil and marked upon

an easel. Man and monster, incredibly, were allies, had already evidently worked out some code of communication!

Kroll peered at whatever his strange companion had drawn on the easel, and then stood watching us as we labored up the last slushy slope. I saw slim Tommy Veering, beyond, tending the humming mechanisms at the base of the tower.

We stopped the sledge twenty yards from Kroll and his appalling ally. He saluted us, with a sort of mocking courtesy, and said:

"Well, Dunbar. Hello, Miss. What can I do for you?"

I said, "We have a proposition to make, Doctor Kroll."

He started when I called that name. Keen-edged, harsh, his voice demanded:

"Well, what is it?"

"We want you to stop Bell's ray," I said. "Put your strange friend back to sleep. Break up all your apparatus. And leave Antarctica, to stay. We'll fly you, in the *Queen*."

His harsh voice—so like Harding's and yet so different—rasped:

"The human race was a biological mistake, Dunbar—and you're part of it. I'm going to rectify the evolutionary error. I'm going to take over the planet and give our visitors from Saturn a chance."

His terrible eyes flickered up to the swollen black monster, and came back to my face.

"What could induce me to accept your preposterous suggestion?"

I knew that we were beaten—I had known it from the first. But I tried to hold a steady voice, a poker face. One second, with that golden sword. . . .

"Something we have here, Doctor Kroll." I gestured toward the sledge. "A greater treasure than you can earn with all your schemes. Accept our terms, and it's yours. Look it over."

Carol had flung back the tarpaulin. We opened the chest. Bright metal and jewels shimmered in the intense blue light. The yellow blade was just beneath my fingers.

But Kroll came no nearer. His long arm made a contemptuous gesture.

"I don't bargain for what is already mine."

"But it isn't yours," I said, "—yet."

I groped for the ancient sword, measuring the distance between us. But he stepped alertly back, and waved his hand to Tommy Veering, who was watching from beside the tower.

"Veering!" he rapped the command. "The stasis ray!"

"Yes, Doctor Kroll."

The thin pale youth held up something that looked like a small movie camera. The intense blue orb on the tower flickered, went dim, as its energy must have been diverted. And another ray flashed toward us, from the little object in Veering's hands—a narrow beam of radiant energy, of a pale magenta color.

It struck through me, painful, stunning, blinding. I tried to move, to snatch and hurl the sword. But my numbed body was arrested, starkly rigid. In that last frozen instant, before shattering darkness fell, I realized the overwhelming horror of this catastrophe.

This was the stasis ray, that had frozen the crystal fossils and the Watcher. Maru-Mora's old weapon of sleep, now turned against her!

Carol and I had been congealed, struck into the eternal hardness of adamantine stone.

The fearful doom that overwhelmed the world when the sleepers awoke from their dreadful sleep will be told in the thrilling chapters that bring this story to a close in next month's WEIRD TALES. We suggest that you reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

The House of Ecstasy

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

This happened to you, this incredibly strange adventure in the house of the hypnotist. Don't you remember?

THIS actually happened to you. And when I say "you," I mean *you*—holding this magazine now, and reading these very words. For I know something about you—something deeply personal—something which, however, I am afraid that you have forgotten.

You're puzzled? You don't believe me? Read on, and I'll prove it to you—you'll see that I am right.

To begin with, where were you at eight o'clock on that warm evening of August 4, 1937?

You don't remember? Oh, but I hope you will, my friend. For, as you read on, you will realize the importance of remembering every detail of that eventful night.

The weather was warm and muggy. It made you restless in the house, until finally you went out for a little walk—down to the store at the corner, to buy a package of cigarettes—to take the air. Nothing of importance, you thought.

A young fellow stopped you, asked for a light. Undoubtedly you have forgotten this too, for you are so often asked for a light. And in the dusk of that muggy evening there was nothing to stamp this young fellow as any different from hundreds of others.

You gave him a match; and as the match flared up in the darkness, you studied his clean-cut whimsical features. Rather attractive, he seemed to you.

You said to yourself, "Here is a man I'd like to know."

Then you lit your own cigarette, and noticed that the young fellow was studying you. You hoped that he too was favorably impressed by what he saw.

"Rather a warm night," he said in a pleasing voice, as he fell into step beside you.

So the two of you discussed the weather for a few moments, walking aimlessly along.

Having thus broken the ice, the stranger asked, "Are you doing anything this evening?"

Somehow this question put you on your guard. What was his racket, anyway? You glanced sharply at his face, at that moment illumined by a street-light which the two of you were passing. But what you saw completely reassured you.

"No," you replied. "I'm not doing anything. Why?"

He laughed a bit embarrassedly.

"Well, you see, there's a clever seer and mystic, who lives just a couple of blocks from here. I was on my way to his house for a séance, when I met you. I'd feel a little less creepy if you'd come along."

It sounded intriguing. But—

"What does he charge?" you asked.

The young man laughed—a pleasant friendly laugh. "No charge at all," he replied. "A *real* mystic doesn't prostitute his weird abilities by making money out of them. Only charlatans do that!"

"Okeh," you said, relieved that there was no fee. "I'll try anything once."

"Come on," he invited.

He led you to one of a block of identical three-story brownstone fronts—no one would ever have imagined what it held. A massive butler answered the door. He looked you suspiciously up and down; then stepping aside, he solemnly ushered you and your friend into a small reception room, where a hunchbacked dwarf of indefinable age arose to greet the two of you. His hairless yellow skin was stretched parchment-like over his skull. His eyes were quick-shifting, black and beady. His slit mouth leered, first at your companion and then at you.

"Well?" he asked in a high-pitched querulous voice, shifting his eyes back to your companion.

"Master," the young man replied, bowing stiffly, "here is the person whom you directed me to bring."

"You have done well, my pupil," quavered the dwarf, his hunched shoulders shaking slightly as at some concealed jest. "You may go."

Astonished and indignant, you turned quickly to confront your guide. But a subtle change seemed to have come over him. In the bright light of the reception room he did not look as pleasing as he had looked on the street.

His dark eyes were set at a decided slant. His black brows were thick and tufted. His ears, nose and chin were pointed. And his sleek black hair was brushed up on each side of his forehead into two little peaks, almost like twin horns.

"Why, you said——" you began indignantly.

"What I *said* is of no matter," he replied with a shrug and a nonchalant wave of one slender hand. Turning on his heel, he stalked out of the room.

You wheeled to follow him; but behind you a sharp voice croaked, "Stop!"

Invisible hands seemed to reach out and grip you, and turn you around, and march you back to the toad-like squatting Master.

He smiled a slitted grin, evidently intended to be ingratiating.

"Why should you flee, my dear fellow?" he murmured. "I am about to do you a favor."

"But—but——" you began.

"Silence!" he snapped. His face was stern. His claw-like hands, on the ends of scrawny arms, reached out toward you in a fluttery gesture as he crooned, "Sleep! Sleep! You are in my power. You will do as I command. Sleep! Sleep!"

A delicious languor spread over you; and, although your mind remained abnormally clear, all control over your own body gradually slipped from you.

The Master's parchment face relaxed into a friendly grin once more.

"You are going to enjoy this," he croaked gleefully, rubbing his taloned hands together. "The ecstasy is going to be all yours. For, alas, my poor crumpled body cannot thrill to the pleasures of the flesh, except vicariously. So I have summoned you here, in the hope that a few crumbs may drop from the table of your enjoyment, for me to pick up."

"Yes, Master." The words came to your lips through no volition of your own.

The little dwarf grinned delightedly, and his hunched shoulders shook with suppressed chuckles.

"This is going to be good!" he chortled. "Come. Follow me."

Like a sleep-walker, you followed him out of the little reception room, down the broad hall, up a flight of stairs, and into a large room with softly carpeted floor, and pictures and mirrors on the wall. The only article of furniture was a couch.

On that couch sat a beautiful young girl, clothed in a gown of some filmy blue

material. Her skin was a creamy olive shade, her hair blue-black and lustrous, her face piquant and oval, her lips full and inviting, and her figure slenderly mature.

But her eyes (so you noted) almost spoiled the picture. They were lusterless and dumb, like those of a stunned animal. You momentarily wondered if your own eyes were not the same. And, when she moved, she moved slowly, swimmingly, as in a slow-motion picture.

"Get up, my little dear," croaked the hunchback, rubbing his hands together, and grinning with anticipation.

The girl arose, her sightless sleep-walking eyes on his penetrating ones.

"Yes, Master." Her tones were flat and dead, and yet they carried the hint of a bell-like quality.

"Here is your partner, my little dear," he continued, with a leer, waving one skinny talon toward you, as you stood sheepishly, striving to free your paralyzed muscles from his hypnotic spell. "Stand up, my little dear."

"Yes, Master."

She rose obediently, and faced you. Somehow, in spite of the dull animal look in her wide eyes, there was something intensely appealing about her. So young. So soft. So virginal. And so alone!

Fascinated, you stared and stared at this vision of loveliness. No longer did you strain to escape, for now your every effort was to break the Master's hypnotic spell, not so as to leap *away*, but rather so as to *go forward*.

As you ran your eyes appraisingly over every line and curve of her perfect figure, the girl mechanically seated herself on the couch, lifted up one shapely leg, crossed her knees, unlatched the slipper, and let it plop to the floor.

Its sudden sound seemed to shock the girl almost into consciousness. Her wide, unseeing eyes narrowed, and her expression became momentarily human — the one touch needed for complete perfection.

But only for a brief instant. Then the Master waved one taloned hand in her direction. "Sleep!" he crooned. "Sleep, my little dear. Sleep."

Her vacant stare returned. She unfastened and took off the other slipper.

The hunchback, grinning fatuously, held up one hand, and said, "My little dear, that will be enough for the present." Then, turning to you, "All right, my boy. She is yours."

Released from your paralysis, although still under his spell, you stole slowly, eagerly forward. Your feet seemed planted in shifting sands. Interminable ages elapsed. Would you never reach her?

Behind you the cracked voice of the Master squeaked. "Welcome him, my little dear."

In response to this command, the girl held out her arms to you. A dumb eagerness suffused her piquant oval face. You in turn held out your arms to her, with an intense yearning to clasp them tightly around her.

At last, after countless ages it seemed, you almost reached her, your fingertips met hers, just barely brushing them, and a tingling thrill swept through you. With one supreme effort, you leaped forward.

But an invisible hand seemed to clamp itself upon one of your shoulders, pulling you backward. And behind you sounded the croak of the Master, saying: "Bah! You are mere automatons! There is no vicarious pleasure to be had by me from such puppet amours as this!"

Then his invisible hand spun you around to face his toad-like leering features.

"Master!" you implored. "Master!"

His slant eyes narrowed, and his slit mouth broadened into a grin.

"I am going to be kind to you," he announced, in his high-pitched, cracked voice. "To the two of you—and to myself. I shall remove my hypnotic spell, and then see if you two cannot react to each other like normal human beings."

He waved one taloned hand imperiously.

"Awake!" he croaked. "It is my command that you both awake."

The invisible hands upon your shoulders relaxed their hold. A shudder passed through you. You lifted up one hand and brushed the cobwebs from your eyes. You drew a deep breath. The sluggish shackles slipped off of your mind and soul. You were free. Free!

Wheeling eagerly, you confronted the beautiful, olive-skinned girl.

But now she drew away from you—her eyes, no longer dumb, now pools of horror. Her two little hands fluttered up in front of her, as if to ward you off. A dull, red flush, commencing at the rounded hollow of her slim young throat, crept slowly up until it suffused her entire face, as she cringed back against the couch.

And you—your eagerness to clasp her in your arms now changed to eagerness to protect her. You halted abruptly.

From behind you there came a cackling laugh and the words, "She does not seem to relish you, my friend. Well, I shall leave the two of you alone together for a while, until you and she become better acquainted. *Adios!*"

A door slammed, and there was the sound of the turning of a key in the lock.

The girl was now seated on the edge of the couch, with one hand raised to her eyes to blot out the unwelcome sight of you.

But by now you were in complete command of yourself, once more a gentleman. "My dear young lady," you breathed, moving forward, "there's nothing to be afraid of. I want to help you; I want to be your friend. Trust me, and I'll try to get you out of here. That dwarf is a dangerous madman, and we've got to forget everything except how to outwit him."

She smiled, and nodded. "I *do* trust you!" she exclaimed, rising and gripping your arm.

Hurriedly you made a circuit of all four walls of the room, carefully inspecting them. It was a room without a single window. There was only one door, and that was of solid oak, and locked.

"It is no use, Galahad," said the girl, in a rich liquid voice, but with a touch of mocking sadness. "The Master has us safely imprisoned, and there's nothing we can do about it. Of course, when he is through with *you*, he will probably let *you* go. But I am to be kept here for good."

"I will come back with the police, and raid the place, and rescue you," you asserted.

She smiled sadly. "I wonder," she said.

"Why do you wonder?" you asked, surprized. "If that crazy dwarf is fool enough to let me loose, it ought to be a simple matter to come back here and break in."

"I wonder."

"Why do you keep saying, 'I wonder'?"

"Because other men have been brought here to me by the Master, and they have promised, just as you are now promising. And yet none of them has ever come back."

"But *I* will."

"I wonder."

"Stop it!" you stormed. "Stop parrotting those words! I'm a gentleman, and I keep my word. Besides I—er—I admire you very much," you continued

lamely. "I've never seen a girl quite like you. *Of course* I'll come back!"

"The Master is a skilful hypnotist. Before he lets you go, he will hypnotize you into forgetting everything."

"He couldn't make a man forget *you!*"

"Yes, even me. Yet perhaps——"

"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps—if you were to hold me in your arms——"

Eagerly you clasped her to you, and covered her upturned flower-face with kisses, until finally your lips met and she returned your passion in one soul-searing embrace.

As you released her, you exultantly exclaimed, "Now let the Master do his worst! I shall never forget that kiss!"

A cackling laugh echoed through the vacant reaches of the room.

Startled, you sprang to your feet; but there was no one in the room. No one except you yourself and the dark-haired, olive-skinned girl.

Again the cackling laugh. It seemed to come from everywhere — from nowhere.

"Where are you, Master?" you cried.

"Aha!" spoke his cracked voice out of the air. "I see that you have learned respect, and that you address me by my proper title. And I thank you for a very pleasant evening; I enjoyed that kiss! You too ought to thank *me.*"

"I don't!" you stormed. "Let us out of here! Let us out of here, or I'll call the police! Where are you, anyway?"

"I am behind one of the mirrors in the wall," he croaked. "It is what is known in the glass trade as an 'X-ray mirror;' that is to say, a transparent one. From *your* side you can see nothing but reflections, whereas from *my* side it is merely a slightly grayed window-pane. And so I have been able to enjoy vicariously your little moment of bliss."

"But your voice?" you asked, incredulous.

"I am talking into a microphone," croaked the invisible dwarf. "There are loud-speakers behind several of the pictures.—And now I am coming in to join my two little playmates."

"If you enter this room, I shall wring your neck!" you raged.

"I rather think not," rasped his high-pitched voice, trailing off into nothingness.

You turned, and placed one arm comfortingly around the shaken girl.

The key grated in the lock. The door opened. The repulsively leering hunchback came hopping in.

Now was your chance. With cool determination, you charged across the room!

But, grinning unconcernedly, he held out one arm in your direction, with the flat of his hand toward you. A mighty invisible blow smote you squarely in the chest, flinging you back upon the couch, and upon the pathetic little figure there.

MAKING passes with his hands, the obscene frog-like Master approached you.

"Sleep! Sleep!" he murmured. "Sleep, my friend."

Your veins filled with water, and you slumped helplessly.

"Get up!" he commanded, not unkindly.

You arose.

"Follow me!"

Like a sleep-walker, you followed.

Behind you, there sounded the pleading voice of your sweetheart, imploring, "Oh, my lover, be sure and make a note of the number of this house when you leave it, and come back and rescue me!"

Love is strong! In spite of the invisible hands which sought to restrain you, you turned and cried, "I will! I promise you!"

Her sweet eyes filled with gladness; then shot a glance toward the Master, a glance filled with scorn for his thwarted powers, then back to you again, welling with perfect confidence.

"I believe you," she cried happily. "I shall be waiting."

Then you turned and followed the hunchback out of the room. Dazedly you were led to the street door.

On the threshold the Master transfixed you with his penetrating gaze, and commanded incisively, "You will now forget all that has happened in this house of ecstasy this evening! Do you hear me? You will forget *all* that has happened! Go down the steps, turn to the right, and walk away. When you reach the corner, you will awake. But you will remember nothing. Good-night, my friend, and I thank you for a very pleasant evening."

The door closed behind you.

Ringing in your ears was the insistent command of the wistful girl who had given you her love. "You must not forget! You must not forget."

Already you felt stronger and more free. The spell was beginning to lift. The vision of a piquant oval pleading face was before your eyes.

"I will not forget!" you stalwartly promised, as you went down the steps. Then, before you turned to the right as commanded, you took careful note of the house-number.

You returned from your walk that evening with a vague idea that something was wrong, a vague realization that you had been out of your house an hour or so longer than you could account for.

You consider yourself to be a man of your word, don't you? And yet you have never returned to the house of ecstasy to rescue that girl, although you solemnly promised her that you would.

I have now told you all that I myself know of the episode. But unfortunately I do not know the address of the house of ecstasy. You need that address. You have to have that address, if you are ever to rescue the girl who loved and trusted you.

Try hard, my friend, try hard.

Can't you remember? You *must* remember!

Abandoned Bog

By JOSEPH C. KEMPE

In all that dim and leafy fen,
Deserted now by beasts and men,
There is no ear to hear the moan
That travels on the dank wind blown,
  Across the thick morass;
No eye to see the loathsome dance
Of forms that cleave the foul expanse
And stand at length on Outer Earth,
And with an eery, lustful mirth
  Chant out the Demon's Mass!

Death Is a Temporary Indisposition

By MAX BROD

An odd little story, told in a psychiatric clinic

THE party of Danish visitors entered the psychiatric clinic.

Inspector Rottky received them and led them along a series of narrow corridors. Several of the inmates worked their way past the visitors, equipped with pails and brooms, dressed in dark blue smocks which came clear down to their ankles. The inspector led the foreign students into Professor Hoeberlein's reception room. He invited them to sit down and wait while he hunted for the professor. Doctor Hoeberlein could not be far away, he was sure, but it might take several minutes to locate him.

It was a large, elegant room with expensive armchairs, with handsomely wainscoted walls and book-cases crammed with books. Through the open windows the young Danes had an excellent view of the beautifully kept gardens of the asylum. The visitors, six of them in all, stood and looked around curiously and then settled themselves cozily in the great chairs. In a few minutes a tall, slender man with an extraordinarily high and handsome forehead and a neat pointed gray beard, stepped into the room. When he saw the six students, he started with surprize. Then he bowed slightly.

"I am Professor Jastrau," he said.

At the sound of the famous name the Danish students sprang up obsequiously and a little nervously from their broad, low chairs.

"Keep your seats, gentlemen, keep your seats!" said Professor Jastrau, and waved his beautifully kept hand with an elegant, slightly weary gesture. He glanced around the room. "My friend Doctor Hoeberlein seems a little slow in getting back." There was a touch of severity in his gaze, but there was in it also something of nonchalance, perhaps rather of preoccupation, that was puzzling but full of charm. "As soon as he comes in, we will go over the whole establishment."

With an easy gesture he drew a cigarette out of a leather case which lay on the table.

"Where have you been thus far, gentlemen? What have you seen?" he inquired politely.

The spokesman of the party started zealously to clamber out of the giant chair into whose soft depths he had just settled for the second time. "We have been in Berlin, Breslau——"

"Please, please, don't disturb yourself," said Professor Jastrau with a charming smile, and his delicate white hand with the cigarette rose from the dark table and with mesmeric cordiality waved the guest back into the depths of his chair again. The professor was a man of the world. His amiable suppleness contrasted strikingly with the stiff and awkward formality of his young guests. "Yes, and what did you see after Breslau?"

"Then we went to Goettingen, and they showed us all over the university

* Adapted by Roy Temple House from the German.

there. Now we have been studying your very fine institutions here."

"Well, well—and it's all rather monotonous, rather ineffectual, don't you think?"

Axel Mundt of Copenhagen turned red with surprize and a degree of indignation. "I beg your pardon, Professor," he said stoutly. "I am sure we should all agree that we have learned something new and very much worth while wherever we have been. Why, even since we have come into your institution here"—he turned toward his companions as if to assure himself of their approval—"we have noticed that the doctors here wear exactly the same sort of dress as the patients. It seems to me that is a very wise arrangement. It is certainly reassuring and soothing for a poor fellow whose mental condition is not quite what it should be, to be identified in appearance with the wise, strong men who are helping him regain his balance——"

There was a strange glint in the professor's eyes for an instant; then he smiled, a little condescendingly. "Very true, very true! You are an extremely observant young man. But I am afraid that here in Germany we are for the most part a little over-conservative. Now just compare us with our neighbors to the southwest, whom a great many Germans are inclined to be a little critical of. For instance, there is an institution in Arles, down on the Mediterranean. It is a modest little place, and not much heard of. But there wasn't a keener investigator or a more remarkable scholar than Professor Debaudy, at the Institute of Arles. You never heard of him? Well, I'm not at all surprized. He was a very cautious and conservative man—very cautious and conservative, indeed. He was not willing to publish his findings till there wasn't the slightest shadow of a doubt about the smallest detail. Ah—Debaudy! I could tell you stories about his wonderful work. Friend Hoeberlein is very slow today. Something must have happened——"

The professor lighted another cigarette. His finely chiseled face was turned toward the window, and the greenish light from the garden gave it an almost supernatural appearance. "I had never heard of the Institute till I happened to have occasion to visit Arles, a few years ago. I was very much astonished, when I ran into Debaudy's laboratory by the merest chance. It was housed in an extension of the neglected old Roman museum. The French don't always keep up their public places as carefully as one might wish. Well, gentlemen, there sat old Professor Debaudy, in a gloomy, dusty, dirty corner room, beside an Egyptian mummy with the bandages unrolled from it, reading articulation exercises in a loud voice. First, phrases with no vowel in them but 'ah,' then phrases with other vowels in turn—the arrangements of sounds that actors use to improve their speech technique.

"I started to get out of the room the way I had come, so as not to disturb the great psychiatrist, but my shoes creaked a little, and he looked up and I had to go back and introduce myself. He was kind enough to remember some of my published articles and to compliment me on them. He was very cordial to me at first, but after a few sentences there came a lull in the conversation. It was perfectly evident that Debaudy wanted to get me out of the way so that he could go on with his exercises. Consumed as I was with curiosity, I stepped over to look at the mummy, although Debaudy was very visibly anxious that I should stay away from it, and even laid his land on my arm with an instinctive movement as if

he wished to push me back, a gesture which he at once inhibited.

" 'What are you trying to do with this mummy, Professor?' I asked. I had a feeling that I should respect the old scientist's desire for privacy, a desire with which I could sympathize perfectly, since caution and a close mouth should be among the fundamental qualities of every serious student. But I had a presentiment as if something of profound importance were going on there, although I had no inkling of what it signified; and I trembled with eagerness to understand it.

"The two of us stood and looked at the ancient mummy. It had dried and shriveled till the earth-brown body looked like the form of a small child, although it was no doubt the remains of a full-grown man. The skin was like parchment, and it was drawn so tightly over the projecting bones that it seemed as if they were ready to burst through it. Debaudy raised his sullen greenish eyes to mine, and was silent for a moment. Then he seemed to make an effort and come to a decision. 'If you must know, I am giving the mummy therapeutic exercises.'—Shall I go on, gentlemen?"

The Danish students did not answer. They did not dare even to clear their throats. They were listening as if their lives depended on their not missing a sound. Professor Jastrau smiled at them, genially pleased by the effect of his narrative. Then he turned his white, intellectual face toward the windows again, and the yellow-green light which made his pale cheeks even paler and appeared to deepen the sockets of his sunken eyes, seemed to heighten the mystery of the strange experience which he was relating.

" 'I am giving the dead man therapeutic exercises,' said Debaudy.

"He looked me over to see how I was taking it; then he went on in a moment, 'That was an art which the Egyptians understood thoroughly. But other peoples have known something about it, too—the Maoris, the Burmans, the Marquesas tribes. It seems as if we modern Europeans have lost touch entirely with the fact that—well, that our dead are not really dead at all. We don't understand any longer that it is our duty to take care of them, to look after them. There is always the possibility that if we apply the right treatment to them—very tedious and difficult treatment, it is true—we can bring them back into a condition which can scarcely be called life, at least as far as our present knowledge goes, but which is no longer that hopeless and terrible condition that is absolute death. What we carelessly assume to be death is in many cases, as I have proved beyond a doubt by my own investigations, only an unfortunate pathological condition which may pass. It is, to be sure, usually accompanied by very serious alterations in the physical organism. But it is not necessarily incurable, as we impatiently take for granted when we pack the dead man into a box like a rotten horse and shovel the dirt over him. I know that the revolt which we all instinctively feel against this brutal smothering of a corpse is based on an instinct of divination within us. When one of your dear ones dies, haven't you noticed how your whole being protests against it, how every clod of earth, every stone that drops into the grave hurts you like a monstrous torture inflicted on the helpless departed? Of course you may say that these are mere foolish feelings and have no objective significance. And then there have been dreams, all sorts of remarkable dreams with regard to people who were supposed to have died. And you will say that they don't count, either.

" 'But experience — experience, sir! Death is curable, I tell you! I can cure death myself, to a certain degree. I

haven't gone very far yet, you understand. But this much I have already proved conclusively: The body of a dead person can be healed of injuries. I have healed wounds on a dead body, bacillary disease, cancer. One does not need to stop the treatment when the patient dies. I do not know yet whether it will ever be possible to restore such a person to his normal pre-mortem life again. You throw a dead man into a hole, so and so many feet beneath the surface, clay and filth between his teeth—good God, how ghastly! It will be pretty hard to make a perfect man of him again, after all that. One of *our* men, I mean! Now the Egyptians treated their dead with balsamic resin, they cleansed them of everything which could by any chance cause decay, they laid them away in pleasant rock caves, in dry, wholesome air——' "

Professor Jastrau was visibly excited by his own narrative. He stood up by the window and breathed in a great draft of the breeze that blew over the flower-beds and through the green trees. And his hearers, completely under his spell, found themselves taking long breaths too, as if to drive out of their lungs the sickening, dull corpse-and-tomb atmosphere.

In a moment Professor Jastrau went on with his narrative.

"Professor Debaudy had no more secrets from me. He showed me a second mummy. He kept this one behind curtains, in a great class case, in a sitting position.

" 'This is a better scholar!' he said when he presented it, and as he spoke he waved a negligent gesture of disparagement and dismissal at the prostrate mummy out in the room. Then he crept into the glass beside the sitting mummy, sat down on a chair which was placed there ready for him, and began to whisper into the sitting figure's ear.

" 'Now listen! He will answer me,' said the old professor.

"I am afraid I heard nothing, or next to nothing. There was, it is true, a faint sort of crackling. But I could not catch an intelligible sound. I am not even sure that all the cracking did not come from the fact that Debaudy moved his hand over the mummy, as one might stroke a child, while we were listening.

"I did not want to seem unsympathetic or incredulous, so I nodded approvingly, and before he had had an opportunity to ask what I had heard, I inquired: 'Do you expect to publish your findings soon? I had never heard anything about these studies of yours, and yet you must have been at them for a long time.'

" 'Thirty-five years,' he answered.

" 'And you haven't published a hint of them in all that time?'

" 'I don't belong to the clan of publicity hounds,' he said, 'who burst out every now and then with sensational discoveries which they can't substantiate. I haven't any use for your quack scientists, with their rejuvenation methods, hormones and all that rubbish. I haven't any particular use for fame or money. I am studying a very difficult and complicated biological problem. Somebody else can figure out the popular formula, the slogan, for my work. There is plenty of time for all that. This thing can't be hurried.'

"I must confess that his attitude was beginning to irritate me. I am afraid I answered him a little hotly. 'But don't you realize, sir, that there is something involved here besides your personal whims and scruples? Perhaps *you* can wait, as you say, but humanity cannot wait. Especially just now, after this terrible war, with its millions of corpses! Can't you see, can't you understand, that if you really are on the track of a great biological discovery, you may be able to

change the whole face of the world? If it is true that it is only necessary to treat a dead body expertly——'

"Debaudy looked at me compassionately and I think a little contemptuously. 'If you had listened a trifle more attentively, you would have noticed that I was careful not to say anything of the sort. My investigations have established that war is an even more terrible thing than is commonly supposed. I see no hope except for bodies that are well preserved. But with our contemporary weapons of destruction, bodies are blown into a thousand fragments. For such corpses as those, there is no resurrection. And I have no help for the poor wretches who are cremated. There is no physician for them, no God, no future. But is it my duty to inform our brave militarists that they are robbing our young men not merely of a few years of life, but of eternity?'

" 'It is your duty to inform them of just that! You must give to the world all the knowledge you have, at once, not only to prolong life where it is possible, but to do what you can to prevent the hideous sin against eternal life that is perpetrated on our battlefields,in our crematories, in our cemeteries——'

"Gentlemen!" Professor Jastrau sprang out of his narrative with a suddenness that raised the hair on the heads of his startled listeners. "The responsibility that rests on us scientists came over me so strongly that moment that I was half crazy with the pain and the burden of it. This old man playing with the trifling details of his discovery, and men and women dying for time and eternity all over the world, all around him! I argued with him, I shouted at him, I lost my temper completely. I——"

Jastrau trembled.

"It is a little hard to tell the rest of it, gentlemen. I declare to you that I got down on my knees before that heartless pedant and begged him to give his findings to the world, and I swear to you that he refused me. It wasn't merely stubbornness or callousness. He despised the human race, he hated his brothers. But I realize that all of this is not sufficient to explain or extenuate my horrible deed. As I pleaded with him there with tears in my eyes, as I argued with him, as I racked my brain for arguments, for inducements, for warnings, someone came into the laboratory. It was his assistant. The funeral director in the next building wanted to see the professor on a matter of business. I followed the two into the funeral parlors. I had no business there, but they paid no attention to me, and the curious proximity of the two establishments gripped me strangely. Moreover, I was determined that the cruel sadist should not escape me.

"Gentlemen, there was a coffin in those parlors. An open coffin. And in that coffin lay a beautiful young girl, pale as wax, with shining, red-blond hair. Her lips were twisted with pain, and about her mouth there was such a reproach, such a reproach—what men were about to do with her—the reproach of the dark, murderous grave they were carrying her to. And that fiend in human shape stood there above her coffin and talked of indifferent matters and lifted not a finger to save her! Gentlemen—may the Lord forgive me!—I know nothing can excuse what I did—I keep my hand steady with a little revolver practise every day, and I had my revolver in my pocket at that moment—I shot Debaudy—I deprived the world of that great but sadly sterile genius—I——"

A red-checked little fat man stepped into the room. It was Doctor Hoeberlein. "Pardon me, gentlemen, I was unavoidably detained. Ah, Klas, you rascal, what are *you* doing in here?"

He rushed angrily at Professor Jastrau, who ran around and took refuge on the other side of the table. "Rottky! Rottky!" Doctor Hoeberlein called impatiently.

The inspector appeared in the door.

"Rottky, what are you thinking about to let Klas run around in the corridors and disturb the visitors?"

Rottky seized the ostensible Professor Jastrau by the arm.

"I'll warrant you," said Professor Hoeberlein to the young Danes, "that Klas has been borrowing Jastrau's name, hasn't he, gentlemen? Ah! And he has been borrowing something else. My cigarettes! Take them away from him, Rottky!"

The inspector jerked the cigarette case out of the tall man's hands and handed it to the doctor. The muscles of Jastrau-Klas's fine face twitched and his shoulders drooped pitifully. Student Axel Mundt of Copenhagen, who was a kind-hearted lad, felt his eyes fill with tears.

Feathertop

A Moralized Legend

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

"DICKON," cried Mother Rigby, "a coal for my pipe!"

The pipe was in the old dame's mouth when she said these words. She had thrust it there after filling it with tobacco, but without stooping to light it at the hearth, where indeed there was no appearance of a fire having been kindled that morning. Forthwith, however, as soon as the order was given, there was an intense red glow out of the bowl of the pipe, and a whiff of smoke from Mother Rigby's lips. Whence the coal came, and how brought thither by an invisible hand, I have never been able to discover.

"Good!" quoth Mother Rigby, with a nod of her head. "Thank ye, Dickon! And now for making this scarecrow. Be within call, Dickon, in case I need you again."

The good woman had risen thus early (for as yet it was scarcely sunrise) in order to set about making a scarecrow which she intended to put in the middle of her corn-patch. It was now the latter week of May, and the crows and blackbirds had

already discovered the little, green, rolled-up leaf of the Indian corn just peeping out of the soil. She was determined, therefore, to contrive as life-like a scarecrow as ever was seen, and to finish it immediately from top to toe, so that it should begin its sentinel's duty that very morning. Now Mother Rigby (as everybody must have heard) was one of the most cunning and potent witches in New England, and might, with very little trouble, have made a scarecrow ugly enough to frighten the minister himself. But on this occasion, as she had awakened in an uncommonly pleasant humor, and was further dulcified by her pipe of tobacco, she resolved to produce something fine, beautiful, and splendid, rather than hideous and horrible.

"I don't want to set up a hobgoblin in my own corn-patch, and almost at my own doorstep," said Mother Rigby to herself, puffing out a whiff of smoke; "I could do it if I pleased, but I'm tired of doing marvelous things, and so I'll keep within the bounds of everyday business, just for variety's sake. Besides, there is no use in scaring the little children for a mile roundabout, though 'tis true I'm a witch."

It was settled therefore in her own mind, that the scarecrow should represent a fine gentleman of the period, so far as the materials at hand would allow. Perhaps it may be as well to enumerate the chief of the articles that went to the composition of this figure.

The most important item of all, probably, although it made so little show, was a certain broomstick, on which Mother Rigby had taken many an airy gallop at midnight, and which now served the scarecrow by way of a spinal column, or, as the unlearned phrase it, a backbone. One of its arms was a disabled flail which used to be wielded by Goodman Rigby, before his spouse worried him out of this troublesome world; the other, if I mistake not, was composed of the pudding stick and a broken rung of a chair, tied loosely together at the elbow. As for its legs, the right one was a hoe-handle, and the left an undistinguished and miscellaneous stick from the woodpile. Its lungs, stomach, and other affairs of that kind were nothing better than a meal-bag stuffed with straw. Thus we have made out the skeleton and entire corporeity of the scarecrow, with the exception of its head; and this was admirably supplied by a somewhat withered and shriveled pumpkin, in which Mother Rigby cut two holes for the eyes, and a slit for the mouth, leaving a bluish-colored knob in the middle to pass for a nose. It was really quite a respectable face.

"I've seen worse ones on human shoulders, at any rate," said Mother Rigby. "And many a fine gentleman has a pumpkin-head, as well as my scarecrow."

But the clothes in this case were to be the making of the man. So the good old woman took down from a peg an ancient plum-colored coat of London make, and with relics of embroidery on its seams, cuffs, pocket-flaps, and buttonholes, but lamentably worn and faded, patched at the elbows, tattered at the skirts, and threadbare all over. On the left breast was a round hole, whence either a star of nobility had been rent away, or else the hot heart of some former wearer had scorched it through and through. The neighbors said that this rich garment belonged to the Black Man's wardrobe, and that he kept it at Mother Rigby's cottage for the convenience of slipping it on whenever he wished to make a grand appearance at the governor's table.

To match the coat there was a velvet waistcoat of very ample size and formerly embroidered with foliage that had been as brightly golden as the maple-leaves in October, but which had now quite van-

ished out of the substance of the velvet. Next came a pair of scarlet breeches once worn by the French governor of Louisbourg, and the knees of which had touched the lower step of the throne of Louis le Grand. The Frenchman had given these smallclothes to an Indian powwow, who parted with them to the old witch for a gill of strong waters, at one of their dances in the forest. Furthermore, Mother Rigby produced a pair of silk stockings and put them on the figure's legs, where they showed as unsubstantial as a dream with the wooden reality of the two sticks making itself miserably apparent through the holes. Lastly, she put her dead husband's wig on the bare scalp of the pumpkin, and surmounted the whole with a dusty three-cornered hat, in which was stuck the longest tail-feather of a rooster.

Then the old dame stood the figure up in a corner of her cottage and chuckled to behold its yellow semblance of a visage, with its nobby little nose thrust into the air. It had a strangely self-satisfied aspect, and seemed to say, "Come look at me!"

"And you are well worth looking at, that's a fact!" quoth Mother Rigby, in admiration at her own handiwork. "I've made many a puppet since I've been a witch; but methinks this is the finest of them all. 'Tis almost too good for a scarecrow. And, by the by, I'll just fill a fresh pipe of tobacco, and then take him out to the corn-patch."

While filling her pipe, the old woman continued to gaze with almost motherly affection at the figure in the corner. To say the truth, whether it were chance, or skill, or downright witchcraft, there was something wonderfully human in this ridiculous shape, bedizened with its tattered finery; and as for the countenance, it appeared to shrivel its yellow surface into a grin,— a funny kind of expression betwixt scorn and merriment,— as if it understood itself to be a jest at mankind. The more Mother Rigby looked the better she was pleased.

"Dickon," cried she, sharply, "another coal for my pipe!"

Hardly had she spoken, when, just as before, there was a red-glowing coal on the top of the tobacco. She drew in a long whiff and puffed it forth again into the bar of morning sunshine which struggled through the one dusty pane of her cottage window. Mother Rigby always liked to flavor her pipe with a coal of fire from the particular chimney-corner whence this had been brought. But where the chimney-corner might be, or who brought the coal from it,—further than that the invisible messenger seemed to respond to the name of Dickon,—I cannot tell.

"That puppet yonder," thought Mother Rigby, still with her eyes fixed on the scarecrow, "is too good a piece of work to stand all summer in a corn-patch, frightening away the crows and blackbirds. He's capable of better things. Why, I've danced with a worse one, when partners happened to be scarce, at our witch-meetings in the forest! What if I should let him take his chance among the other men of straw and empty fellows who go bustling about the world?"

The old witch took three or four more whiffs at her pipe and smiled.

"He'll meet plenty of his brethren at every street-corner!" continued she. "Well, I didn't mean to dabble in witchcraft today, further than the lighting of my pipe; but a witch I am, and a witch I'm likely to be, and there's no use in trying to shirk it. I'll make a man of my scarecrow, were it only for the joke's sake!"

While muttering these words, Mother Rigby took the pipe from her own mouth

and thrust it into the crevice which represented the same feature in the pumpkin visage of the scarecrow.

"Puff, darling, puff!" said she. "Puff away, my fine fellow! Your life depends on it!"

This was a strange exhortation, undoubtedly, to be addressed to a mere thing of sticks, straw, and old clothes, with nothing better than a shriveled pumpkin for a head; as we know to have been the scarecrow's case. Nevertheless, as we must carefully hold in remembrance, Mother Rigby was a witch of singular power and dexterity; and keeping this fact duly before our minds, we shall see nothing beyond credibility in the remarkable incidents of our story. Indeed, the great difficulty will be at once got over if we can only bring ourselves to believe that as soon as the old dame bade him puff, there came a whiff of smoke from the scarecrow's mouth. It was the very feeblest of whiffs, to be sure; but it was followed by another and another, each more decided than the preceding one.

"Puff away, my pet; puff away, my pretty one!" Mother Rigby kept repeating, with her pleasantest smile. "It is the breath of life to ye; and that you may take my word for."

Beyond all question the pipe was bewitched. There must have been a spell either in the tobacco or in the fiercely glowing coal that so mysteriously burned on top of it, or in the pungently aromatic smoke which exhaled from the kindled weed. The figure, after a few doubtful attempts, at length blew forth a volley of smoke extending all the way from the obscure corner into the bar of sunshine. There it eddied and melted away among the motes of dust. It seemed a convulsive effort; for the two or three next whiffs were fainter, although the coal still glowed and threw a gleam over the scarecrow's visage. The old witch clapped her skinny hands together, and smiled encouragingly upon her handiwork. She saw that the charm worked well. The shriveled, yellow face, which heretofore had been no face at all, had already a thin, fantastic haze, as it were, of human likeness, shifting to and fro across it; sometimes vanishing entirely, but growing more perceptible than ever with the next whiff from the pipe. The whole figure, in like manner, assumed a show of life. If we must needs pry closely into the matter, it may be doubted whether there was any real change, after all, in the sordid, worn-out, worthless and ill-jointed substance of the scarecrow; but merely a spectral illusion, and a cunning effect of light and shade so colored and contrived as to delude the eyes of most men. The miracles of witchcraft seem always to have had a very shallow subtlety; and, at least, if the above explanation do not hit the truth of the process, I can suggest no better.

"Well puffed, my pretty lad!" still cried old Mother Rigby. "Come, another good stout whiff, and let it be with might and main. Puff for thy life, I tell thee! Puff out of the very bottom of thy heart; if any heart thou hast, or any bottom to it! Well done, again! Thou didst suck in that mouthful as if for the pure love of it."

And then the witch beckoned to the scarecrow, throwing so much magnetic potency into her gesture that it seemed as if it must inevitably be obeyed.

"Why lurkest thou in the corner, lazy one?" said she. "Step forth! Thou hast the world before thee!"

In obedience to Mother Rigby's word, and extending its arm as if to reach her outstretched hand, the figure made a step forward,—a kind of hitch and jerk, however, rather than a step,—then tottered

and almost lost its balance. What could the witch expect? It was nothing after all, but a scarecrow stuck upon two sticks. But the strong-willed old bedlam scowled and beckoned, and flung the energy of her purpose so forcibly at this poor combination of rotten wood and musty straw and ragged garments, that it was compelled to show itself a man, in spite of the reality of things.

So it stepped into the bar of sunshine. There it stood,—poor devil of a contrivance that it was!—with only the thinnest vesture of human similitude about it, through which was evident the stiff, rickety, incongruous, faded, tattered, good-for-nothing patchwork of its substance, ready to sink in a heap on the floor, as conscious of its own unworthiness to be erect. Shall I confess the truth? At its present point of vivification, the scarecrow reminds me of some of the lukewarm and abortive characters, composed of heterogeneous materials, used for the thousandth time, and never worth using, with which romance writers (and myself, no doubt, among the rest) have so overpeopled the world of fiction.

But the fierce old hag began to get angry and show a glimpse of her diabolic nature (like a snake's head peeping with a hiss out of her bosom) at this pusillanimous behavior of the thing which she had taken the trouble to put together.

"Puff away, wretch!" cried she, wrathfully. "Puff, puff, puff, thou thing of straw and emptiness! thou rag or two! thou meal-bag! thou pumpkin-head! thou nothing! Where shall I find a name vile enough to call thee by? Puff, I say, and suck in thy fantastic life along with the smoke; else I snatch the pipe from thy mouth and hurl thee where that red coal came from."

Thus threatened, the unhappy scarecrow had nothing for it but to puff away for dear life. As need was, therefore, it applied itself lustily to the pipe and sent forth such abundant volleys of tobacco-smoke that the small cottage-kitchen became all vaporous. The one sunbeam struggled mistily through, and could but imperfectly define the image of the cracked and dusty window-pane on the opposite wall. Mother Rigby, meanwhile, with one brown arm akimbo and the other stretched toward the figure, loomed grimly amid the obscurity with such port and expression as when she was wont to heave a ponderous nightmare on her victims and stand at the bedside to enjoy their agony. In fear and trembling did this poor scarecrow puff. But its efforts, it must be acknowledged, served an excellent purpose; for, with each successive whiff, the figure lost more and more of its dizzy and perplexing tenuity and seemed to take denser substance. Its very garments, moreover, partook of the magical change, and shone with the gloss of novelty and glistened with the skilfully embroidered gold that had long ago been rent away. And, half revealed among a smoke, a yellow visage bent its lusterless eyes on Mother Rigby.

At last the old witch clenched her fist and shook it at the figure. Not that she was positively angry, but merely acting on the principle—perhaps untrue, or not the only truth, though as high a one as Mother Rigby could be expected to attain—that feeble and torpid natures, being incapable of better inspiration, must be stirred up by fear. But here was the crisis. Should she fail in what she now sought to effect, it was her ruthless purpose to scatter the miserable simulacrum into its original elements.

"Thou hast a man's aspect," said she, sternly. "Have also the echo and mockery of a voice! I bid thee speak!"

The scarecrow gasped, struggled, and at length emitted a murmur, which was so incorporated with its smoky breath that you could scarcely tell whether it were

indeed a voice or only a whiff of tobacco. Some narrators of this legend held the opinion that Mother Rigby's conjurations, and the fierceness of her will, had compelled a familiar spirit into the figure, and that the voice was his.

"Mother," mumbled the poor stifled voice, "be not so awful with me! I would fain speak; but being without wits, what can I say?"

"Thou canst speak, darling, canst thou?" cried Mother Rigby, relaxing her grim countenance into a smile. "And what shalt thou say, quotha! Say, indeed! Art thou of the brotherhood of the empty skull, and demandest of me what thou shalt say? Thou shalt say a thousand things, and saying them a thousand times over, thou shalt still have said nothing! Be not afraid, I tell thee! When thou comest into the world (whither I purpose sending thee forthwith), thou shalt not lack the wherewithal to talk. Talk! Why, thou shalt babble like a mill-stream, if thou wilt. Thou hast brains enough for that, I trow!"

"At your service, mother," responded the figure.

"And that was well said, my pretty one," answered Mother Rigby. "Then thou spakest like thyself, and meant nothing. Thou shalt have a hundred such set phrases, and five hundred to the boot of them. And now, darling, I have taken so much pains with thee, and thou art so beautiful, that, by my troth, I love thee better than any witch's puppet in the world; and I've made them of all sorts,—clay, wax, straw, sticks, night-fog, morning-mist, sea-foam, and chimney-smoke. But thou art the very best. So give heed to what I say."

"Yes, kind mother," said the figure, "with all my heart!"

"With all thy heart!" cried the old witch, setting her hands to her sides and laughing loudly. "Thou hast such a pretty way of speaking. With all thy heart! And thou didst put thy hand to the left side of thy waistcoat, as if thou really hadst one!"

So now, in high good humor with this fantastic contrivance of hers, Mother Rigby told the scarecrow that it must go and play its part in the great world, where not one man in a hundred, she affirmed, was gifted with more real substance than itself. And, that he might hold up his head with the best of them, she endowed him, on the spot, with an unreckonable amount of wealth. It consisted partly of a gold mine in Eldorado, and of ten thousand shares in a broken bubble, and of half a million acres of vineyard at the North Pole, and of a castle in the air, and a château in Spain, together with all the rents and income therefrom accruing. She further made over to him the cargo of a certain ship, laden with salt of Cadiz, which she herself, by her necromantic arts, had caused to founder, ten years before, in the deepest part of mid-ocean. If the salt were not dissolved, and could be brought to market, it would fetch a pretty penny among the fishermen. That he might not lack ready money, she gave him a copper farthing of Birmingham manufacture, being all the coin she had about her, and likewise a great deal of brass, which she applied to his forehead, thus making it yellower than ever.

"With that brass alone," quoth Mother Rigby, "thou canst pay thy way all over the earth. Kiss me, pretty darling! I have done my best for thee."

Furthermore, that the adventurer might lack no possible advantage toward a fair start in life, this excellent old dame gave him a token by which he was to introduce himself to a certain magistrate, member of the council, merchant, and elder of the church (the four capacities constituting but one man), who stood at the

head of society in the neighboring metropolis. The token was neither more nor less than a single word which Mother Rigby whispered to the scarecrow, and which the scarecrow was to whisper to the merchant.

"Gouty as the old fellow is, he'll run thy errands for thee, when once thou hast given him that word in his ear," said the old witch. "Mother Rigby knows the worshipful Justice Gookin, and the worshipful Justice knows Mother Rigby!"

Here the witch thrust her wrinkled face close to the puppet's, chuckling irrepressibly, and fidgeting all through her system, with delight at the idea which she meant to communicate.

"The worshipful Master Gookin," whispered she, "hath a comely maiden to his daughter. And hark ye, my pet! Thou hast a fair outside, and a pretty wit enough of thine own. Yea, a pretty wit enough! Thou wilt think better of it when thou hast seen more of other people's wits. Now, with thy outside and thy inside, thou art the very man to win a young girl's heart. Never doubt it! I tell thee it shall be so. Put but a bold face on the matter, sigh, smile, flourish thy hat, thrust forth thy leg like a dancing-master, put thy right hand to the left side of thy waistcoat, and pretty Polly Gookin is thine own!"

All this while the new creature had been sucking in and exhaling the vapory fragrance of his pipe, and seemed now to continue this occupation as much for the enjoyment it afforded as because it was an essential condition of his existence. It was wonderful to see how exceedingly like a human being it behaved. Its eyes (for it appeared to possess a pair) were bent on Mother Rigby, and at suitable junctures it nodded or shook its head. Neither did it lack words proper for the occasion: "Really! Indeed! Pray tell me! Is it possible! Upon my word! By no means! Oh! Ah! Hem!" and other such weighty utterances as imply attention, inquiry, acquiescence, or dissent on the part of the auditor. Even had you stood by and seen the scarecrow made, you could scarcely have resisted the conviction that it perfectly understood the cunning counsels which the old witch poured into its counterfeit of an ear. The more earnestly it applied its lips to the pipe the more distinctly was its human likeness stamped among visible realities, the more sagacious grew its expression, the more life-like its gestures and movements, and the more intelligibly audible its voice. Its garments, too, glistened so much the brighter with an illusionary magnificence. The very pipe, in which burned the spell of all this wonder-work, ceased to appear as a smoke-blackened earthen stump, and became a meerschaum, with painted bowl and amber mouth-piece.

It might be apprehended, however, that as the life of the illusion seemed identical with the vapor of the pipe, it would terminate simultaneously with the reduction of the tobacco to ashes. But the beldam foresaw the difficulty.

"Hold thou the pipe, my precious one," said she, "while I fill it for thee again."

It was sorrowful to behold how the fine gentleman began to fade back into a scarecrow while Mother Rigby shook the ashes out of the pipe and proceeded to replenish it from her tobacco-box.

"Dickon," cried she, in her high, sharp tone, "another coal for this pipe!"

No sooner said than the intensely red speck of fire was glowing within the pipe-bowl; and the scarecrow, without waiting for the witch's bidding, applied the tube to his lips and drew in a few short, convulsive whiffs, which soon, however, became regular and equable.

"Now, mine own heart's darling," quoth Mother Rigby, "whatever may happen to thee, thou must stick to thy pipe.

Thy life is in it; and that, at least, thou knowest well, if thou knowest nought besides. Stick to thy pipe, I say! Smoke, puff, blow thy cloud; and tell the people, if any question be made, that it is for thy health, and that so the physician orders thee to do. And, sweet one, when thou shalt find thy pipe getting low, go apart into some corner and (first filling thyself with smoke) cry sharply, 'Dickon, a fresh pipe of tobacco!' and 'Dickon, another coal for my pipe!' and have it into thy pretty mouth as speedily as may be. Else, instead of a gallant gentleman in a gold-laced coat, thou wilt be but a jumble of sticks and tattered clothes, and a bag of straw, and a withered pumpkin! Now depart, my treasure, and good luck go with thee!"

"Never fear, mother!" said the figure, in a stout voice, and sending forth a courageous whiff of smoke. "I will thrive, if an honest man and a gentleman may!"

"Oh, thou wilt be the death of me!" cried the old witch, convulsed with laughter. "That was well said. If an honest man and a gentleman may! Thou playest thy part to perfection. Get along with thee for a smart fellow; and I will wager on thy head, as a man of pith and substance, with a brain, and what they call a heart, and all else that a man should have, against any other thing on two legs. I hold myself a better witch than yesterday, for thy sake. Did not I make thee? And I defy any witch in New England to make such another! Here; take my staff along with thee!"

The staff, though it was but a plain oaken stick, immediately took the aspect of a gold-headed cane.

"That gold head has as much sense in it as thine own," said Mother Rigby, "and it will guide thee straight to worshipful

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Master Gookin's door. Get thee gone, my treasure; and if any ask thy name, it is Feathertop. For thou hast a feather in thy hat, and I have thrust a handful of feathers into the hollow of thy head, and thy wig, too, is of the fashion they call Feathertop,—so be Feathertop thy name!"

And, issuing from the cottage, Feathertop strode manfully toward town. Mother Rigby stood at the threshold, well pleased to see how the sunbeams glistened on him, as if all his magnificence were real, and how diligently and lovingly he smoked his pipe, and how handsomely he walked, in spite of a little stiffness of his legs. She watched him until out of sight, and threw a witch benediction after her darling, when a turn of the road snatched him from her view.

BETIMES in the forenoon, when the principal street of the neighboring town was just at its acme of life and bustle, a stranger of very distinguished figure was seen on the sidewalk. His port as well as his garments betokened nothing short of nobility. He wore a richly embroidered plum-colored coat, a waistcoat of costly velvet magnificently adorned with golden foliage, a pair of splendid scarlet breeches, and the finest and glossiest of white silk stockings. His head was covered with a peruke, so daintily powdered and adjusted that it would have been sacrilege to disorder it with a hat; which therefore (and it was a gold-laced hat, set off with a snowy feather) he carried beneath his arm. On the breast of his coat glistened a star. He managed his gold-headed cane with an airy grace peculiar to the fine gentlemen of the period; and, to give the highest possible finish to his equipment, he had lace ruffles at his wrist, of a most ethereal delicacy, sufficiently avouching how idle and aristocratic must be the hands which they half concealed.

It was a remarkable point in the accouterment of this brilliant personage, that he held in his left hand a fantastic kind of a pipe, with an exquisitely painted bowl and an amber mouth-piece. This he applied to his lips as often as every five or six paces, and inhaled a deep whiff of smoke, which, after being retained a moment in his lungs, might be seen to eddy gracefully from his mouth and nostrils.

As may well be supposed, the street was all astir to find out the stranger's name.

"It is some great nobleman, beyond question," said one of the townspeople. "Do you see the star at his breast?"

"Nay; it is too bright to be seen," said another. "Yes; he must needs be a nobleman, as you say. But by what conveyance, think you, can his lordship have voyaged or traveled hither? There has been no vessel from the old country for a month past; and if he have arrived overland from the southward, pray where are his attendants and equipage?"

"He needs no equipage to set off his rank," remarked a third. "If he came among us in rags, nobility would shine through a hole in his elbow. I never saw such dignity of aspect. He has the old Norman blood in his veins, I warrant him."

"I rather take him to be a Dutchman, or one of your high Germans," said another citizen. "The men of those countries have always the pipe at their mouths."

"And so has a Turk," answered his companion. "But, in my judgment, this stranger hath been bred at the French court, and hath there learned politeness and grace of manner, which none understand so well as the nobility of France. That gait, now! A vulgar spectator might deem it stiff,—he might call it a hitch and jerk, but, to my eyes, it hath an unspeakable majesty, and must have been ac-

quired by constant observation of the deportment of the Grand Monarque. The stranger's character and office are evident enough. He is a French ambassador, come to treat with our rulers about the cession of Canada."

"More probably a Spaniard," said another, "and hence his yellow complexion; or, most likely, he is from the Havana, or from some port on the Spanish main, and comes to make investigation about the piracies which our governor is thought to connive at. Those settlers in Peru and Mexico have skins as yellow as the gold which they dig out of their mines."

"Yellow or not," cried a lady, "he is a beautiful man!—so tall, so slender! such a fine, noble face, with so well-shaped a nose, and all that delicacy of expression about the mouth! And, bless me, how bright his star is! It positively shoots out flames!"

"So do your eyes, fair lady," said the stranger, with a bow and a flourish of his pipe; for he was just passing at the instant. "Upon my honor, they have quite dazzled me."

"Was ever so original and exquisite a compliment?" murmured the lady, in an ecstasy of delight.

Amid the general admiration excited by the stranger's appearance, there were only two dissenting voices. One was that of an impertinent cur, which after snuffing at the heels of the glittering figure, put its tail between its legs and skulked into its master's back-yard, vociferating an execrable howl. The other dissentient was a young child, who squalled at the fullest stretch of his lungs, and babbled some unintelligible nonsense about a pumpkin.

Feathertop, meanwhile, pursued his way along the street. Except for the few complimentary words to the lady, and

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now and then a slight inclination of the head in requital of the profound reverences of the bystanders he seemed wholly absorbed in his pipe. There needed no other proof of his rank and consequence than the perfect equanimity with which he comported himself, while the curiosity and admiration of the town swelled almost into clamor around him. With a crowd gathering behind his footsteps, he finally reached the mansion-house of the worshipful Justice Gookin, entered the gate, ascended the steps of the front door, and knocked. In the interim, before his summons was answered, the stranger was observed to shake the ashes out of his pipe.

"What did he say in that sharp voice?" inquired one of the spectators.

"Nay, I know not," answered his friend. "But the sun dazzles my eyes strangely. How dim and faded his lordship looks all of a sudden! Bless my wits, what is the matter with me?"

"The wonder is," said the other, "that his pipe, which was out only an instant ago, should be all alight again, and with the reddest coal I ever saw. There is something mysterious about this stranger. What a whiff of smoke was that! Dim and faded did you call him? Why, as he turns about, the star on his breast is all ablaze."

"It is, indeed," said his companions; "and it will go near to dazzle pretty Polly Gookin, whom I see peeping at it out of the chamber-window."

The door being now opened, Feathertop turned to the crowd, made a stately bend of his body like a great man acknowledging the reverence of the meaner sort, and vanished into the house. There was a mysterious kind of a smile, if it might not better be called a grin or grimace, upon his visage; but of all the throng that beheld him not an individual appears to have possessed insight enough to detect the illusive character of the stranger except a little child and a cur dog.

Our legend here loses somewhat of its continuity, and, passing over the preliminary explanations between Feathertop and the merchant, goes in quest of the pretty Polly Gookin. She was a damsel of a soft, round figure, with light hair and blue eyes, and a fair, rosy face, which seemed neither very shrewd nor very simple. This young lady had caught a glimpse of the glistening stranger while standing at the threshold, and had forthwith put on a laced cap, a string of beads, her finest kerchief, and her stiffest damask petticoat, in preparation for the interview. Hurrying from her chamber to the parlor, she had ever since been viewing herself in the large looking-glass and practising pretty airs,—now a smile, now a ceremonious dignity of aspect, and now a softer smile than the former, kissing her hand likewise, tossing her head, and managing her fan; while within the mirror an unsubstantial little maid repeated every gesture and did all the foolish things that Polly did, but without making her ashamed of them. In short, it was the fault of pretty Polly's ability rather than her will if she failed to be as complete an artifice as the illustrious Feathertop himself; and, when she thus tampered with her own simplicity, the witch's phantom might well hope to win her.

No sooner did Polly hear her father's gouty footsteps approaching the parlor door, accompanied with the stiff clatter of Feathertop's high-heeled shoes, than she seated herself bolt-upright and innocently began warbling a song.

"Polly! daughter Polly!" cried the old merchant. "Come hither, child."

Master Gookin's aspect, as he opened the door, was doubtful and troubled.

"This gentleman," continued he, presenting the stranger, "is the Chevalier

Feathertop,—nay, I beg his pardon, my Lord Feathertop,—who hath brought me a token of remembrance from an ancient friend of mine. Pay your duty to his lordship, child, and honor him as his quality deserves.

After these few words of introduction, the worshipful magistrate immediately quitted the room. But, even in that brief moment, had the fair Polly glanced aside at her father instead of devoting herself wholly to the brilliant guest, she might have taken warning of some mischief nigh at hand. The old man was nervous, fidgety, and very pale. Purposing a smile of courtesy, he had deformed his face with a sort of galvanic grin, which, when Feathertop's back was turned, he exchanged for a scowl, at the same time shaking his fist and stamping his gouty foot,—an incivility which brought his retribution along with it.

The truth appears to have been, that Mother Rigby's word of introduction, whatever it might be, had operated far more on the rich merchant's fears than on his good-will. Moreover, being a man of wonderfully acute observation, he had noticed that the painted figures on the bowl of Feathertop's pipe were in motion. Looking more closely, he became convinced that these figures were a party of little demons, each duly provided with horns and a tail, and dancing hand in hand, with gestures of diabolical merriment, round the circumference of the pipe-bowl. As if to confirm his suspicions, while Master Gookin ushered his guest along a dusky passage from his private room to the parlor, the star on Feathertop's breast had scintillated actual flames, and threw a flickering gleam upon the wall, the ceiling, and the floor.

With such sinister prognostics mani-

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festing themselves on all hands, it is not to be marveled at that the merchant should have felt that he was committing his daughter to a very questionable acquaintance. He cursed, in his secret soul, the insinuating elegance of Feathertop's manners, as this brilliant personage bowed, smiled, put his hand on his heart, inhaled a long whiff from his pipe, and enriched the atmosphere with the smoky vapor of a fragrant and visible sigh. Gladly would poor Master Gookin have thrust his dangerous guest into the street; but there was a constraint and terror within him. This respectable old gentleman, we fear, at an earlier period of life, had given some pledge or other to the evil principle, and perhaps was now to redeem it by the sacrifice of his daughter.

It so happened that the parlor-door was partly of glass, shaded by a silken curtain, the folds of which hung a little awry. So strong was the merchant's interest in witnessing what was to ensue between the fair Polly and the gallant Feathertop, that after quitting the room he could by no means refrain from peeping through the crevice of the curtain.

But there was nothing very miraculous to be seen; nothing—except the trifles previously noticed—to confirm the idea of a supernatural peril environing the pretty Polly. The stranger, it is true, was evidently a thorough and practised man of the world, systematic and self-possessed, and therefore the sort of a person to whom a parent ought not to confide a simple young girl, without due watchfulness for the result.

The worthy magistrate, who had been conversant with all degrees and qualities of mankind, could not but perceive every motion and gesture of the distinguished Feathertop came in its proper place; nothing had been left rude or native in him; a well-digested conventionalism had incorporated itself thoroughly with his substance and transformed him into a work of art. Perhaps it was this peculiarity that invested him with a species of ghastliness and awe. It is the effect of anything completely and consummately artificial, in human shape, that the person impresses us as an unreality and as having hardly pith enough to cast a shadow upon the floor. As regarded Feathertop, all this resulted in a wild, extravagant, and fantastical impression, as if his life and being were akin to the smoke that curled upward from his pipe.

But pretty Polly Gookin felt not thus. The pair were now promenading the room; Feathertop with his dainty stride and no less dainty grimace; the girl with a native maidenly grace, just touched, not spoiled, by a slightly affected manner, which seemed caught from the perfect artifice of her companion. The longer the interview continued, the more charmed was pretty Polly, until, within the first quarter of an hour (as the old magistrate noted by his watch), she was evidently beginning to be in love. Nor need it have been witchcraft that subdued her in such a hurry; the poor child's heart, it may be, was so very fervent that it melted her with its own warmth as reflected from the hollow semblance of a lover. No matter what Feathertop said, his words found depth and reverberation in her ear; no matter what he did, his action was heroic to her eye. And by this time it is to be supposed there was a blush on Polly's cheek, a tender smile about her mouth, and a liquid softness in her glance; while the star kept coruscating on Feathertop's breast, and the little demons careered with more frantic merriment than ever about the circumference of his pipe-bowl. O pretty Polly Gookin, why should these imps rejoice so madly that a silly maiden's heart was about to be given to a

(Please turn to page 504)

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Feathertop

(Continued from page 502)

shadow! Is it so unusual a misfortune, so rare a triumph?

By and by Feathertop paused, and throwing himself into an imposing attitude, seemed to summon the fair girl to survey his figure and resist him longer if she could. His star, his embroidery, his buckles, glowed at that instant with unutterable splendor; the picturesque hues of his attire took a richer depth of coloring; there was a gleam and polish over his whole presence betokening the perfect witchery of well-ordered manners. The maiden raised her eyes and suffered them to linger upon her companion with a bashful and admiring gaze. Then, as if desirous of judging what value her own simple comeliness might have side by side with so much brilliancy, she cast a glance toward the full-length looking-glass in front of which they happened to be standing. It was one of the truest plates in the world, and incapable of flattery. No sooner did the images therein reflected meet Polly's eye than she shrieked, shrank from the stranger's side, gazed at him for a moment in the wildest dismay, and sank insensible upon the floor. Feathertop likewise had looked toward the mirror, and there beheld, not the glittering mockery of his outside show, but a picture of the sordid patchwork of his real composition, stripped of all witchcraft.

The wretched simulacrum! We almost pity him. He threw up his arms with an expression of despair that went further than any of his previous manifestations toward vindicating his claims to be reckoned human: for perchance the only time since this so often empty and deceptive life of mortals began its course, an illusion had seen and fully recognized itself.

MOTHER RIGBY was seated by her kitchen hearth in the twilight of this eventful day, and had just shaken the ashes out of a new pipe, when she heard a hurried tramp along the road. Yet it did not seem so much the tramp of human footsteps as the clatter of sticks or the rattling of dry bones.

"Ha!" thought the old witch, "what step is that? Whose skeleton is out of its grave now, I wonder?"

A figure burst headlong into the cottage door. It was Feathertop! His pipe was still alight; the star still flamed upon his breast; the embroidery still glowed upon his garments; nor had he lost, in any degree or manner that could be estimated, the aspect that assimilated him with our mortal brotherhood. But yet, in some indescribable way (as is the case with all that has deluded us when once found out), the poor reality was felt beneath the cunning artifice.

"What has gone wrong?" demanded the witch. "Did yonder sniffling hypocrite thrust my darling from his door? The villain! I'll set twenty fiends to torment him till he offer thee his daughter on his bended knees!"

"No, mother," said Feathertop, despondingly; "it was not that."

"Did the girl scorn my precious one?" asked Mother Rigby, her fierce eyes glowing like two coals of Tophet. "I'll cover her face with pimples! Her nose shall be as red as the coal in thy pipe! Her front teeth shall drop out! In a week hence she shall not be worth thy having!"

"Let her alone, mother," answered poor Feathertop; "the girl was half won; and methinks a kiss from her sweet lips might have made me altogether human. But," he added, after a brief pause and then a howl of self-contempt, "I've seen myself, mother! I've seen myself for the wretched, ragged, empty thing I am! I'll exist no longer!"

Snatching the pipe from his mouth, he flung it with all his might against the chimney, and at the same instant sank upon the floor a medley of straw and tattered garments, with some sticks protruding from the heap and a shriveled pumpkin in the midst. The eyeholes were now lusterless; but the rudely carved gap, that just before had been a mouth, still seemed to twist itself into a despairing grin, and was so far human.

"Poor fellow!" quoth Mother Rigby, with a rueful glance at the relics of her ill-fated contrivance. "My poor, dear, pretty Feathertop! There are thousands upon thousands of coxcombs and charlatans in the world, made up of just such a jumble of worn-out, forgotten and good-for-nothing trash as he was! Yet they live in fair repute, and never see themselves for what they are. And why should my poor puppet be the only one to know himself and perish for it?"

While thus muttering, the witch had filled a fresh pipe of tobacco, and held the stem between her fingers, as doubtful whether to thrust it into her own mouth or Feathertop's.

"Poor Feathertop!" she continued. "I could easily give him another chance and send him forth again tomorrow. But no; his feelings are too tender, his sensibilities too deep. He seems to have too much heart to bustle for his own advantage in such an empty and heartless world. Well! well! I'll make a scarecrow of him after all. 'Tis an innocent and a useful vocation, and will suit my darling well; and if each of his human brethren had as fit a one, 'twould be the better for mankind; and as for this pipe of tobacco, I need it more than he."

So saying Mother Rigby put the stem between her lips. "Dickon!" cried she, in her high, sharp tone, "another coal for my pipe!"

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MANY of you, the readers, have shown your astuteness in comparing *The Diary of Alonzo Typer*, by William Lumley, to the stories of the late great master of weird fiction, H. P. Lovecraft. Some of you even asked whether this was a posthumous story of Lovecraft's, written under a pen name. The fact is that William Lumley is the correct name of a new writer, who was a pupil of Lovecraft's. *The Diary of Alonzo Typer* was the creation of Mr. Lumley's brain, but was revised under Mr. Lovecraft's supervision, and thereby bears traces of the master's style.

Teotihuacan

E. Hoffmann Price writes from Redwood City, California: "Hardly had I read a page of *The Diary of Alonzo Typer* when I suspected a hand from the grave: the certain touch of H. P. Lovecraft. Long before I reached the middle, I came to passages that I will wager none but HPL could have written. The last paragraph on the right half of page 160 was a dead give-away. It conclusively proved HPL's writing. HPL and I discussed Shamballah at great length; I seriously doubt if any other writer in your pages ever made reference to it. I am certain that the (authentic) *Book of Dzyan* never occurred in any of the works of your other authors. It is quite conceivable that someone may have run across that ponderous mountain of lore which is suggested by Shamballah in *Dzyan*, I admit. But all told, it sounds too much like HPL in its very presentation; I must either believe that HPL's ghost is walking, that William Lumley is, like the Dalai Lama, an incarnation of a previous master, or that this yarn is one of those oddly-named 'collaborations'. . . . If William Lumley wrote that yarn without consultation with HPL, he has succeeded in a feat I had deemed utterly impossible: writing a story that is more like Lovecraft than Lovecraft himself! Whatever its history, I was glad to see it in print. The references to Shamballah reminded me of many a letter HPL and I exchanged, and of our own collaboration, a few years ago. Now here is a challenge to one or more of Lovecraft's followers: The Old Master had pondered, for some time before his death, on this matter of a weird story whose locale was to be the Valley of Teotihuacan—'the dwelling of the gods'—in the now bleak and desolate expanse of country somewhat north of Lake Texcoco, nearly forty minutes' drive from Mexico City. I had sent HPL photos, data, personal impressions and reactions to the pyramids and crypts of the valley. We had even planned, whimsically of course, to have Robert E. Howard join us in an expedition to Teotihuacan: I to be chauffeur, R. E. H. swordsman and gunner, and HPL to be necromancer for the party. And whenever I see their names, it reminds me of a plan that was really not impossible, up until that tragic day in June of 1936 when R. E. H. went on an exploration unaccompanied by any of his friends. This whole issue, I might say, reminds me of the dead who have no equals among the survivors: Lovecraft, Howard, Whitehead. Like the Valley of Teotihuacan, the February issue is a memento of dead giants. Well, what valiant acolyte of HPL will fictionize the mysterious Valley of Teotihuacan? Me, I am not equal to the task, though I have had quite a handful of Mexican adventure yarns in print since my jaunt south. Many wishes for a happy and prosperous 1938."

From Gertrude Hemken

Gertrude Hemken writes from Chicago: "Now that we are dazedly emerging from

the holidaze, let us see what we can tell you of the February WEIRD TALES. Virgil's cover is striking—yes, indeed! His color models look so real, like real color photos. This blond beauty certainly pleases me. . . . Strange and daring science, say I—freezing a gal for years and years. De Grandin didn't exorcise any malignant spirits, but he certainly made a fine show in defrosting the lovely lady. But—come two questions to the mind now: the gal was frizzed while suffering a fever; now, after twenty years she is revived in good health—does that mean the germs were killed to death in the extreme cold? Query number 2—after twenty years, would not the body become aged quite rapidly? I am taking it for granted Nikakova was still as young-looking after as before—or am I all wrong? Grrrwuuu—snakes and slimy, slithery things beyond sealed doors, and diaries by scared men—and so Alonzo Typer meets his end to complete an awfully creepy yarn. . . . Well, effen it aint my new pal Rald, turned soldier of fortune. My, my! I notice Virgil kept the hair style as Clifford Ball had described it when we first met Rald as the thief of Forthe—and such a beautiful back! Y'know I was kinda glad these Amazons sorta took sympathy on the men—as for Bubaste just disappearing—pouf—when the brand was applied—well, I just have no argument! Whatever course Rald may pursue is right by me—do I like him—or do I? . . . Hi—HK—so you built a time-machine?—and look what happened! No, you wouldn't give us the satisfaction of anything fantastic. I felt that I had awakened from a queer dream—somehow unsated. Next time, give us a time trip back into something ver' pleasant. . . . Now *The Passing of Van Mitten* was one of the few translations I really enjoyed. The whole seemed to be a running thot of any one of us at approaching death—and the closing was too too cute—who knows but that this Claude Farrère actually hit upon the right thing? Strange to say, I have run out of things for gossip—so until next month—*au revoir.*"

Old Cornish Litany

H. Sivia writes from Palestine, Texas: "Virgil Finlay's illustration for the Old Cornish Litany gets my vote for first place

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1924	1925	1936	1937	1938
....	....	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.
....	....	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
Mar.	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.
Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	....
May	May	May	May	....
June	June	June	June	....
July	July	July	July	....
....	....	....	Aug.	....
Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	....
Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	....
Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	....
Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	....

These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

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in a really swell February issue. Just about every type of material horror is represented in this drawing, but I like the spindle-legged gentleman with the melancholy countenance best of all. The litany itself is something to rave about. Not satisfied with drooling over it alone, I showed it to a friend, whereat he, too, was ravished with delight. I like especially Kuttner's time-machine yarn and Lumley's *The Diary of Alonzo Typer,* which is strangely reminiscent of Lovecraft's style. . . . On page 182, in *The Goddess Awakes,* Cene cries out her renunciation of the title of priestess of Bubaste. In so doing she refers to Hess, or Bast, as 'a sadistic goddess.' At the risk of appearing presumptuous, may I remind Mr. Ball that the infamous Marquis de Sade was contemporary with the later Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century years? This period is antedated in a matter of several hundred years by the era that produced characters such as Rald and Thwaine."

Laurels for Quinn

H. Latta Pinkerton writes from Philadelphia: "All hail Seabury Quinn! Very sorry if I am incoherent, but this typewriter just doesn't have the words I need to tell how deftly Quinn handled his magnificent inspiration, wove fact and fancy into *Roads,* and produced a tale that for sheer artistry ranks by itself. I need hardly point out what this statement implies, since it is just that literary quality which has always characterized the best of WT stories, and early justified your boast of 'the unique magazine.' I know of no other 'magazine of the bizarre and the unusual' which will bear reading aloud; yet my wife and I regularly apply this acid test to WT. Only rarely does it let us down, and this month it touched heights of greatness in the singing pen of Seabury Quinn."

Finlay's Art Work

Robert W. Lowndes writes from Greenwich, Connecticut: "The art work in the new February issue of WEIRD TALES leaves one rather breathless, a delight heightened for me by the fact that, after four days tireless haunting of local news stands, gnawing my nails at the thought that the magazine might have been suspended, a copy shone there, today, before my still-hopeful eyes, in all its radiant glory. Brundage's January cover was beauteous, but, with few exceptions, her women have all possessed, of late, an artificiality raised to such an extent that one cannot imagine them as anything else than exquisite mechanisms, voluptuously molded, yes, but giving little or no semblance of reality; definitely not the kind that could arouse censure, for they are too unearthly for an intelligent critic to view as objectionable. Virgil Finlay's creation, on the other hand, is real and gorgeously vibrant with the illusion of actuality. And the male figure, with its proper expression of adoration, is no less commendable. As for his black and white work, I still fail to see signs of deterioration, which might be expected, inasmuch as Finlay is doing the lion's share of the drawings. Mooney's decoration in this issue is excellent."

A Masterful Piece

John R. Small writes from Washington, D. C.: "My letters to you are few and far between, for I am far too busy to make the writing of fan letters my avocation. However, may I take a few minutes of your time to give you my impressions of a truly magnificent story, *Roads,* by Seabury Quinn? This remarkable tale was one of the finest which WEIRD TALES has ever published. If I am any judge of stories, *Roads* will long be remembered by readers, and I am willing to wager that years hence it will be mentioned more than once in the Eyrie. The author has done such a masterful piece of writing, such an artistic job in creating this tale, that he should be congratulated by thousands, and acclaimed as the master of the historical weird tale. He has no living equal, I am sure."

The Witch's Mark

William Charles Raiser writes from New York City: "May I commend you for the excellent and thrilling story in your January issue entitled *The Witch's Mark,* by Dorothy Quick? For sheer dramatization I have not read anything to equal it for a long time. You can depend upon my purchasing your magazine regularly if you continue to feature this kind of story-telling."

The Genius of Virgil Finlay

Donald V. Allgeier writes from Springfield, Missouri: "As issue after issue of WT comes to me I marvel more and more at the genius of Virgil Finlay. His new series of

weird pictures is splendid. Don't let him get away. First place in the January number goes to *The Hairy Ones Shall Dance.* It seems to be a magnificent novel by another talented newcomer. Your serials are usually fine. Only occasionally do you slip up by allowing a hackneyed, amateurish story like *The Voyage of the Neutralia.* Dorothy Quick, a favorite woman writer, deserves second place for *The Witch's Mark.* The story enthralled me. However, when I stop to analyze it now, I realize that it is based on an idea that has been used many times in weird stories. It is the genius of the author that makes it outstanding. *Toean Matjan* pleasantly surprized me. I expected the old story of the lady by day, tiger by night. Instead, I found a delightful and charming tale which gets my vote for third place."

In Canada

Maxine L. Hudson writes from Masefield Sook, Canada: "I took a trip into Canada and carried my copy of WEIRD TALES to read on the train. Was so pleased that your magazine printed another story by the author of *Symphony of the Damned,* although this is such a short story. I enjoyed the author's quick style of suspense. All through it there was the rushing speed of the locomotive."

Joint Appreciation

Mrs. E. S. Wilson writes from Longview, Washington: "For many years Mr. Wilson and myself have been interested readers of WEIRD TALES and we feel that the quality is getting better and better all the time. We've intended to write many times, as delightful stories like *Once in a Thousand Years* have appeared in the magazine; but this time we just had to tell you that we think *Roads* by Seabury Quinn is one of the loveliest and most beautiful stories of the Christmas spirit that we have ever read anywhere. We have adored Jules de Grandin for many years and feel that his creator is getting better and better all the time."

A Lovecraft Protege

J. Vernon Shea, Jr., writes from Pittsburgh: "Far and away the best story in the February issue is *The Diary of Alonzo Typer,* the finest tale in months. I don't recall ever having seen the name of William Lumley before, and yet from internal evi-

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That 34 per cent of the subscriptions received by WEIRD TALES are for a period of three years?

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dence he would seem to be a Lovecraft protégé. He needs to learn only not to overcrowd his details, and to be a little more careful of his style. His story has a convincing touch of *outsideness*. Seabury Quinn seems to have difficulty in fitting Jules de Grandin into his Russian political story, and really he seemed less at home with the character than I have ever seen him. Despite all the medical detail, *Frozen Beauty* was unconvincing. . . . In your reprint section, why not alternate selections from early issues with weird masterpieces that are difficult to obtain? For instance, I have always wanted to read M. P. Shiel's famous *The House of Sounds*, yet cannot locate a copy. Then, too, William Hope Hodgson's excellent novels are inaccessible to most weird readers. Like others who have written to the Eyrie, I would much prefer to read a long reprint than a number of mediocre new stories."

Alonzo Typer

Franklyn Brady writes from Beverly Hills, California: "I have just finished reading your February issue, which I certainly think is the best one yet. My choice for first place is *The Diary of Alonzo Typer*. I believe that no other story has ever given me as many scares as this one did. I really think that reading this story at night helped on the chills it gave me. Although the diary angle is quite old, the contents of it made up for this. I had never heard of the author, William Lumley, but I like his style very much. My choice for second place goes to Henry Kuttner, with his *World's End*. Perhaps I liked this and all the rest of his stories because I know him personally, he living also in Beverly Hills. Seabury Quinn surprized me by writing a story of Santa Claus instead of his usual Jules de Grandin. The Jules de Grandin tales and a yarn about Santa Claus are certainly different. Keep up the good work, and for goodness sake, keep the stories *weird*."

Then and Now

Joseph Matika, of Foley, Alabama, writes: "While the WEIRD TALES of fourteen or fifteen years ago was a pioneer in this type of fiction, printing stories of a type which other magazines refused to consider, and giving us some fine yarns, it did not, in my opinion, come up to the standards maintained by the magazine we know today. WEIRD TALES is more than just another 'pulp'—it seems more like a personal diary, written for each of us readers individually! It contains tales like the ones 'the old folks' used to tell by the lambent light of a fireplace, when we were very young. It fills, as nothing ever did before, a great need among us, your readers, and though some of us register a 'kick' now and then, we squawk like the Dickens if we miss an issue. As I write these lines, I have before me the December issue. The cover is by Virgil Finlay. As yet I have not read a word in this issue, but that cover by Finlay is a weird tale in itself. The golden beauty of the girl is something so unearthly as to seem almost alien. What an exquisite creature! And, as if to enhance a beauty that has already passed all bounds of perfection, the artist injected a bit of contrast in the repellent features of the white-haired crone in the water."

A Master of the Bizarre

L. A. Petts, of Tolworth, England, writes: "I would like to see a few more letters from the English side of the world printed in your Eyrie chats, because it seems to make the magazine more personal to us over here. I regard WEIRD TALES not in the ordinary run as a mere magazine, but one of superior reading quality. The bizarre, unnatural and highly imaginative stories have great appeal for me, especially those dealing with mystic cults and forbidden books. These stories invariably lend themselves to the fashionable pencil of that superb artist Virgil Finlay. Truth to say, I have yet to see a series of more finely executed drawings than have been appearing under his name. His nudes are exceptionally real and sometimes—most times—beautiful. Virgil is also a master of the bizarre expression—the underlying feel of his drawings; and besides giving them tone, there is a deeper, more defined quality that is hard to find depicted by other artists. . . . I vastly prefer his cover illustrations, too—more so than the overdone, round-limbed women of Brundage. You know, sometimes Virgil's covers are worth cutting out and keeping. My taste in stories is for you to omit scientifiction and stick to occultism. The hard facts of science, the coldness of time-travel and space-travel, do not mix with much harmony with old-age romance and witchery. That, of course, is

only my point of view. I do not like finishing a Conan story to have to turn to one of Martians. Nevertheless, I shall stick to WEIRD TALES as long as the present standard of quality is maintained."

Titles

Wally Brophy writes from Newark, New Jersey: "I have enjoyed *our* publication for many years. Hope you don't mind my using the possessive. WT really belongs to the readers, *n'est ce pas?* I have noticed with keen appreciation the increased quality of our serials. . . . There can be no doubt as to the steady improvement of WT, especially in the more recent issues. I have one suggestion to make, however, that will, I believe, help WT to acquire new readers. That is in regard to the titles. While I myself am a regular reader, I can understand a new reader's disapproval upon seeing such titles as *The Thing on the Door-Step, The Hairy Ones Shall Dance,* and *The Thing on the Floor.* Don't you think the authors could show a little more respect for those perfectly swell stories they write, or are they secretly enjoying a joke at our expense?"

Seven Readers

Edith Mulder writes from Lindenhurst, New York: "When I was a youngster of eleven I found two or three copies of WEIRD TALES in my sister's room. I devoured every story and have been doing just that ever since. I am nineteen now; so that's quite a while. There were seven of us and we were all daffy about weird stories. . . . I've never written to any magazine before, but January's WEIRD TALES just made me do so. I just adored the story by Seabury Quinn, *Roads.* I felt as if I had just emerged from a dream when I finished. I liked the other stories, too, but *Roads* just did something to me. . . . I like the new character, Rald, introduced by Clifford Ball. He's a bit like Conan, but not a copy. He's really different."

The Hairy Ones

Ted Phillips writes from Fleetville, Pennsylvania: "I often read in letters to the Eyrie how many years the writers have been readers of WEIRD TALES. I began in 1924, I think, and have complete files of all issues up to the present time, beginning with January, 1928, and some in 1927. The pseudo-

NEXT MONTH

Thunder in the Dawn

By HENRY KUTTNER

HERE is a story to stir the pulse—a tale of warlocks and wizards and the terrible thing that was known as the Shadow—a tale of valiant men and deeds and red battle in the far-off olden time—a tale that will grip your interest from the first word to the last.

THIS short novel introduces to our readers a new hero: Elak of Atlantis. A doughty soldier of fortune, he experienced a series of weird adventures that make most fascinating reading. This unusual story will begin

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scientific stories bore me, rather, though their relationship to the weird is obvious—the magic of today is the science of tomorrow. I am interested by Gans T. Field's classification of werewolf motivation. I admire the novelty of Mr. Field's plot for *The Hairy Ones Shall Dance.* I never came across one at all like it, though I prefer weird fiction to any other and my reading of it is as extensive as other interests will allow."

Orchids and Brickbats

Clifton Hall writes from Los Angeles: "*World's End,* by Kuttner, was tops in the February issue. Hank had a refreshingly new angle on the time-travel proposition. The only objection: If the future-man so easily understood the mechanism of the machine, why hadn't he made one himself? *The Passing of Van Mitten* takes second spot. The old boy's death agony was so realistic that I pinched myself twice to make sure it wasn't *I* who was doing the act. Moretti's *The Strangling Hands* packed a punch, and slips into third place. . . . Rald, in *The Goddess Awakes,* was a disappointment. In *The Thief of Forthe* we saw a magnificent savage, loyal as a friend, formidable as a foe, moving silently through the night to take what he wanted from any man; the nimbleness of his feet was matched only by the alertness of his brain. In this latest story, however, we find him a bragging, insensitive brute who conquered the big cat only through a lucky accident. Where is the old Rald?"

Concise Comments

Emil Petaja writes from Hollywood, California: "I continue to read and enjoy WEIRD TALES, and am gratified to see so many of Lovecraft's stories and poems posthumously printed. Some of the newer writers are doing splendidly; and Quinn, Keller, and C. L. Moore are always welcome. Virgil Finlay's full-page black and whites are certainly a splendid innovation."

Samuel V. Cox writes from Indianapolis: "I have been reading your inestimable magazine for five years, and now out of the deep silences I want to come forward and make myself known. I can truthfully say that yours is the only magazine treating of eery tales, for you print the cream of weird fiction."

George Gorge writes from New York City: "*The Piper from Bhutan* by David Bernard was exceedingly well done. I greatly admire these short stories, and particularly this one, which was very well set up and executed."

Harry Altshuler writes from Philadelphia: "I'd like to put in a cheer for the Virgil Finlay series. If mechanical considerations would permit, how about printing them on a coated paper insert? Too much of his lovely detail is lost on the pulp paper."

Herbert V. Ross writes from London, England: "Your magazine gets better every month. The loss of some of your best authors is a blow, but you still have Clark Ashton Smith, Seabury Quinn, C. L. Moore, the Binder brothers, Bloch, etc., and I see you have some likely newcomers. Will you reprint *The Chain of Aforgomon* by C. A. Smith, sometime; it is weird and exotic, one of Smith's best, I think."

Robert J. Hoyer writes from Chicago: "My favorite story in the February WEIRD TALES was *The Goddess Awakes* by Clifford Ball. That young man is an up and coming candidate for top honors with your readers. I hope he makes a saga of the doings of his hero, Rald."

Robert Oberon writes from Denmark, Maine: "Your new feature, Virgil Finlay's series of full-page drawings illustrating weird poetry, is a definite asset to your magazine."

Dorothy Reynolds writes from New York City: "I found *The Witch's Mark,* by Dorothy Quick, in your January number, especially good. May we have many more by the same author?"

John Getchell writes from Westerly, Rhode Island: "Finlay is truly a great artist. I am something of a painter myself, so know whereof I speak. He has great powers of imagination. I enjoyed *The Sea-Witch* very much. Let's have more like it."

Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the February issue, as we go to press, was *The Diary of Alonzo Typer,* by a new writer, William Lumley.

W. T.—8

COMING NEXT MONTH

BRANNER had risen. His boots clumped on the floor as he moved toward the door. He stalked leisurely into the hall and made for the lower landing, merging with the shadows that clustered black about the stair.

Griswell lay incapable of movement, his mind a whirl of bewilderment. Who was that whistling upstairs? Why was Branner going up those stairs? Griswell saw him pass the spot where the moonlight rested, saw his head tilted back as if he were looking at something Griswell could not see, above and beyond the stair. But his face was like that of a sleepwalker. He moved across the bar of moonlight and vanished from Griswell's view, even as the latter tried to shout to him to come back. A ghastly whisper was the only result of his effort.

The whistling sank to a lower note, died out. Griswell heard the stairs creaking under Branner's measured tread. Now he had reached the hallway above, for Griswell heard the clump of his feet moving along it. Suddenly the footfalls halted, and the whole night seemed to hold its breath. Then an awful scream split the stillness, and Griswell started up, echoing the cry.

The strange paralysis that had held him was broken. He took a step toward the door, then checked himself. The footfalls were resumed. Branner was coming back. He was not running. The tread was even more deliberate and measured than before. Now the stairs began to creak again. A groping hand, moving along the balustrade, came into the bar of moonlight; then another, and a ghastly thrill went through Griswell as he saw that other hand gripped a hatchet which dripped blackly. *Was* that Branner who was coming down that stair?

Yes! The figure had moved into the bar of moonlight now, and Griswell recognized it. Then he saw Branner's face, and a shriek burst from Griswell's lips. Branner's face was bloodless, corpse-like; gouts of blood dripped darkly down it, his eyes were glassy and set, and blood oozed from the great gash *which cleft the crown of his head!* . . .

You will not want to miss this fearsome story of frightful death and three women whose bodies hung in a dreadful room of horrors. This posthumous novelette by a late great master of weird fiction will be printed complete in the May issue of WEIRD TALES.

PIGEONS FROM HELL

By Robert E. Howard

——Also——

GOETTERDAEMMERUNG

By SEABURY QUINN

There was a moment of stunning impact as the two cars crashed together, then a strange awakening—but what was the inscription on the tombstone in that ancient graveyard? A strange tale of the future.

THE SECRET OF THE VAULT

By J. WESLEY ROSENQUEST

What dread mystery lurked in the charnel chamber beneath the deep cellars of the house, and what impious rites of life and death were performed there?

THUNDER IN THE DAWN

By HENRY KUTTNER

A story to stir the pulses—a tale of warlocks and wizards and valiant men of might in the far-off olden time—a gripping tale of Elak of Atlantis. A thrilling story you will not easily forget.

THE ISLE OF THE SLEEPER

By EDMOND HAMILTON

If we are but images in the dreams of some supernal being who slumbers, what will happen when the Sleeper awakes? A strange and fantastic story.

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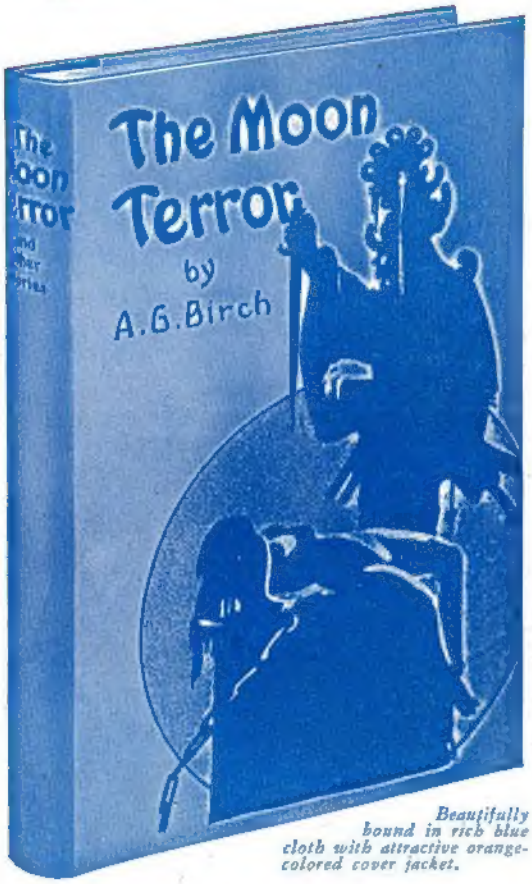

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